Withdrawal of U.S. Military Engagement and The Erosion of Liberal Democratization: An Afghan Perspective

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Abstract
The recent humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan denotes the failure of US-led liberal democratization in authoritarian and non-democratic countries, especially in the Muslim world. Having been witnessed a long-term war in a foreign land, after a detailed deliberation in the Doha agreement, the U.S. military stand-up has been overthrown with the rise of the Taliban. It can be viewed as a failed policy of the U.S. government since the emergence of the “War on Terror” to improve the stability in Afghanistan. Instead of allowing democratic reforms and good governance, the U.S. fulfilled its false desire to dismantle terrorism and religious fundamentalism. Ultimately, the U.S. completely degraded its moral strength to universalize democratic values and representative government. After bloody decades, all the U.S. military forces returned to their motherland with a bare hand but left an uncertain future for Afghan people that had to be resolved through consensus.

Keywords
democratisation; taliban; terrorism; consensus

Introduction
By diagnosing the current political environment at the global level, probably in terms of foreign intervention, it could be articulated that the process of democratization is still an issue of great significance. After the cold war, the inflicted tendency for universalizing the democratic system in the world got a creative instinct with the rise of U.S. military exercises and, more certainly, a new morality evolved at the global level “non-democracies are evil”. Stability was the primary foreign policy objective of the Lyndon B. Johnson, Nixon, and Ford administrations. It was perceived that stable dictator were better for U.S. interests than countries in democratic transition, which may be susceptible to Communism (Lawson & Epstein, 2017).

Unfortunately, the process of military intervention has deteriorated with the decline of human dignity and the persistent expansion of human casualties in different foreign lands. In 74% of the cases comparing the level of democratization in the year of the intervention with the average level in the three years after, there is no change (Meernik, 1996). It might be an incongruent behavior of a system or a government to promote democratic values in an undemocratic manner, and these are some perennial issues of our century, however. Out of many, U.S. military deployment had done nothing spectacular as expected from their foreign policy options, and conspicuously, there are still on the track to defame undemocratic structures through active military presence, not in a peaceful negotiation, as others did in several ways. Afghanistan, since the cold war, has been experiencing foreign intervention.

For that reason, Afghanistan would be the first country to locate in a vicious circle of both the crisis of

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human rights and good governance. Maybe, in some sense, it can be interpreted as a problem of tri-polarity, U.S., Taliban, and the absence of international consciousness. As per the Doha agreement, U.S. military strength has vanished vehemently and the Taliban group is supposed to take the initial responsibility to fill up the power vacuum because of their gun politics. The Doha agreement simply paved the way for the pulling out of foreign forces, thus ending America’s longest war (Hussain, 2021). Now we are watching a great transformation in the history of international politics on the one hand and the degradation of democratic morality on the other; it could be a nightmare for the U.S., if they remember their retrenchment from Afghanistan, they might be amazed at the fact that their achievement in Afghanistan would be the decline of the Western model of democracy in the East and the rise of indigenous political order without any reference to western political culture.

This research aims to, First, examine the liberal democratization led by the U.S.A. in the aftermath of the Cold War; Second, highlight the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan since the invasion of the U.S.A. through Bush doctrine; Third, unveil the reasons behind America’s failure in Afghanistan with a strong military superpower. Fourth, acknowledge prevailing conditions for the degradation of democratic transition in Afghanistan.

Methods

The research paper signifies a normative method to accomplish the objectives. The researcher has considered the qualitative nature of the research as the plausible tool to describe the subject matter of this paper. The researcher is convinced with the fact that the current political crisis in Afghanistan would not be understood from a quantitative perspective due to the shortage of resources and time. Secondary sources have been used for data collection, such as journal articles, books, research papers, and online website material on the topic.

Results and Discussion

Democratization and the Process of Regime Change

The concept of democracy is a contested understanding in the horizon of political discourse, not all but many thinkers and philosophers have been investing their valuable ink to overcome the trauma and vagueness of the democracy; moreover, we will be confident with the universalization of democracy as a final and best form of human government, but it can be really a matter of debate that shall the other model government be able to produce a humane effect? We can’t gather in the same opinion, but, by reviewing our world history, several forms of the government system, other than democracy, have been tested through time, but no one has qualified to be a competitor of democratic government. The coding of democratic transition is based on relevant changes in political freedom regarding participation in free and contested elections (Cervellati & Sunde, 2014). The traditional study of democratization largely became a comparative politics study of a one-way process of regime change, from authoritarian to democracy (Galbreath, 2012). After a relentless evolution of Taliban in Afghanistan, after a span of 20 years, it shows the reactionary signal to democracy as an alternative, and fellow Americans are expected to recognize the Taliban as their foreign policy objective, not as a rivalry but as a competitor.

Democratization is an ongoing process that could not be stopped because of its growing demand in non-democratic countries since the second world war. The explosive spread of democracy around the world
beginning in the mid-20th century radically transformed the international political landscape from one in which democracies were the exception to one in which they were the rule (Galbreath, 2012). Samuel P. Huntington, an American political scientist, in his celebrated work *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century,* identified three major phases of democratization of the world. The collapse of Communism in 1989 and the pro-democracy demonstrations in China in the same year led to the belief that liberal democracy was fast becoming the only legitimate political ideology (Grugel, 2001). Post-cold war democratization was legitimized by U.S. military presence in many authoritarian countries and non-democracies; eventually, many had transformed into democracy and others were maintained in their regime with the previous governing system. As the first decade of the post-cold war period draws to a close, one thing is certain: military intervention remains a central feature of American foreign policy (Haass, 1999).

The invasion of Iraq and the subsequent war forces us to recognize that the terrain of democratization has irrevocably altered since the 1980s and 1990s, when democratization studies were consolidated as an important sub-field within politics and international relations (Galbreath, 2012). The rising tendency for democratizing other nations, from a U.S. perspective, produced a westernization of the eastern world through liberal values such as free market, human rights, freedom of press and speech, and constitutional government. “Even after high-profile failures in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, some in the policy community still call for ousting illiberal regimes. Regime-change advocates claim that this tool can achieve objectives more cheaply and quickly than sustained diplomatic pressure and engagement and that such operations will not expand into broader military action” (Denison, 2020b). Even after watching the chaos produced in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya following regime change, some in Washington have continued to advocate similar policies toward Venezuela, Iran, North Korea, and elsewhere (Denison, 2020a). The violent overthrow of Saddam’s regime in Iraq and the subsequent outbreak of mass terrorism, probably ISIS, shows the utter failure of U.S. military presence to penetrate democratic values.

The recent death of Iranian military Chief general Qasem Solemani triggered the growing enthusiasm of the western model to be adopted in the East and, more broadly, the military means to take over the undemocratic governments. Continuous observation of the U.S. on the countries of the Middle East, since the end of the cold war, claims the arbitrary intervention in the matter of national interests. For that reason, the universalization of democratic governance has been lost its foundation; however, U.S. military presence and brutal engagement in different countries signify the readiness of the U.S. to convert all the governments, those who are non-democratic, to reduce democratic culture except their local preference and political environment.

9/11, War on Terror and The Birth of Tragedy

There are many instances where American troops engaged themselves to sustain the democratic values, although they have failed in several grounds, ranging from the Vietnam war to Afghanistan; everywhere, they have been following the same principle of gun power. Probably, two decades back, an Afghan militant group, Mujahidin, led by a young leader Osama Bin Laden, hijacked four U.S. jetliners and crashed on September 11, 2001. After massive casualties and destruction, this event led to a violent response from the U.S. government for seeking an act of serious revenge, especially the demonstrative fire speech of the then American President, George W. Bush, at the World Trade Centre on September 14, 2001. However, to date, what George W. Bush called the global war on terror had succeeded remarkably, if provisionally, in its single most important goal from an American national security perspective: protecting the homeland, and American therein, from attack (Hoffman, 2004). Its military dimension involved major wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, covert operations in Yemen and elsewhere, large-scale military-assistance programs for cooperative regimes, and significant increases in military spending (Jackson, 2020; Lumbangaol, 2021).

The big realization of U.S. on terrorism and growing fundamentalism made a strong world view as a response to 9/11; moreover, the military engagement in Afghanistan has been followed by three significant periods, in between these war period, not only terrorist groups but also the civilians were experienced a massive degradation of fundamental liberties, rights and basic necessities for a good life. Under the direction of President Barack Obama, American military exercise captured and assassinated Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda. After this incident, the long battle with Afghanistan was
supposed to be closed, but unfortunately, the longest war and defeat for the U.S. were waiting horribly. It was unexpected for the U.S. and obviously, for all, to overcome the losses both at the domestic and international level. From a democratic perspective, the U.S. has done nothing spectacular to improve the internal stability and political unification; after 20 years, Afghanistan is still under a terror environment without any basic facilities and progress.

The U.S. went into Afghanistan in 2001 out of a desire for revenge following the 9/11 attacks on American soil, with little understanding of the land (Hussain, 2021). In the name of revenge and withering away of terrorism, the U.S. would have been undertaken some more humane and constitutional reforms to settle their internal disputes between the civilian government and Taliban, but, in all ways, they have lost everything in Afghanistan, starting from international reputation to the democratic fate. For a democratic transition, particularly in authoritarian and non-democratic regimes, two significant conditions are highly required: support from the local institution and civil societies; secondly, peaceful negotiations among the rival parties and popular demand and support. After the 9/11 attack on the U.S. trade Centre and subsequent response of American military force was a signal for those who strongly upheld the terror activities against the civilian and institutions, but if we consider the present withdrawal of the U.S. Army from Afghanistan signifies that the negotiation of U.S. with Taliban, in Doha agreement, it would seem as unbelievable on the issue of U.S.'s retrenchment in an urgent basis without because after this withdrawal, the whole Afghanistan would come under an anti-democratic group whose prime purpose would be to inculcate religious fundamentalism and rule of Sharia Laws, not the constitution.

Suppose we rectify the foreign policy of the U.S. concerning Afghanistan. In that case, it will be a preference, particularly the Afghan instability, of the western model to achieve a long-term objective. Still, eventually, the entire U.S. signal on Afghanistan has been blurred. The main focus area would be the self-clarification of American troops and government on the achievements in Afghanistan within a period of 20 years, though it was not a short time to start something good and new. According to the Doha agreement and stipulated deadline for America, they were forced to flee from Afghanistan with an invisible sign of humiliation. On August 30, after the longest war, U.S. military troops were relocated themselves in their own motherland. The collapse of the Afghan government after the United States spent billions to support it and Afghan security forces was a crushing and violent coda to U.S. military mission in American's longest war (Zucchino, 2021).

U.S. military engagement in Afghanistan came under intense criticism of the growing human rights violation and political instability resulting from internal contradictions between terrorist groups and the U.S. army. The horrible outcome of 9/11 shows a broader aspect of American foreign policy objective and their long-term investment, both material and human capital, for a fancy goal, for an act of revenge. Finally, the 20 years of labor and aspiration forced them to quit Afghanistan. Despite the optics, the U.S. policymakers still continue to insist that the Afghan mission had been “successful” (Mearsheimer, 2019).

Rise of Taliban and Twenty Years Crisis

At just short of 20 years, the now ending U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan was America's longest war (Davidson, 2021). As Afghanistan tumbles into the Taliban's hands, the avalanche of recrimination and outright condemnation of the Biden administration's withdrawal of U.S. troops in Afghanistan has become unrelenting (Stevens, 2021). While the withdrawal of the U.S. and its allies is heavily being criticized, the ramifications of the Taliban taking control in Afghanistan are becoming painfully clear (Mehra & Wentworth, 2021). As history shows, the Taliban emerged in 1994 with a small fraction of students, and now the number has exceeded to 2,00,000. Post the overthrow of the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan, the Taliban rose to prominence with its heavily religious principles, recruiting followers from madrasas both from within the country and from within the country and from its neighbors (India Times, 2021a). To be honest, the return of the Taliban was foretold after the U.S. signed and exit an agreement in Doha in February 2000 (Hussain, 2021). After talking of freedom, democracy, and human rights for the last two decades, there is little doubt that the West will be moving quickly towards accommodating the Taliban regime (Mearsheimer, 2019).

The rise of the Taliban has been brainwashed as an anti-west, anti-democratic and anti-modern system
of governance; moreover, the very nature of the Taliban government would not just be to contain the U.S. and other allies but also establish their own system of rules as per their religious scriptures and personal laws. After two decades, having been experienced a long-term war in a foreign land, American military engagement has been uprooted. Finally, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan came under the substantial expansion of the Taliban. It is a historical move towards a more uncertain future, both for Afghanistan and the western world led by the U.S., after 20 years of struggle, violent human rights abuses, and political turmoil.

After a complete military and civilian evacuation from Afghanistan, U.S. President Joe Biden addressed his country with a sense of satisfaction and goodwill for the upcoming future. He pointed out two decades of destruction of U.S. Dollars and army personnel. Still, He missed the crisis that has been prevailing in Afghanistan since the engagement of the U.S. through military equipment. Now, the Taliban has re-formed a hardline government and restored the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan exactly on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of America's invasion of the country (Wells, 2022). The consequences of Afghanistan would be impacted to major powers of Asian continent, particularly China, Pakistan and India as per their geographical affiliation. However, Taliban rule in Afghanistan raises the prospects of further terrorism directed against India a refugee outflows to Europe, the specter of populist Islamist governance in West Asia, and intensifying competition between China and the U.S. for global influence (Matthieu, Meissen, Scheinberg, & Dunn, 2021). Even as Pakistan gleefully celebrates its "win against America," Western officials and media have taken a sharp turn away from whipping Pakistan alone within weeks of Kabul's fall (Wells, 2022).

Now, at this juncture, we all are amazed by considering a historical equation that would not have happened if there had been negotiation and diplomatic cooperation between the two countries. The assessment from both sides should be done impartially because, to some extent, the 20 years of engagement might ask for a fair review from both sides based on their performances to achieve their respective objectives. Surely, the Taliban has achieved something spectacular; however, after the final departure of the U.S. Army, Taliban members were celebrated complete independence of Afghanistan as well as for themselves, since they were on the same line for acquiring power from the U.S. The Taliban celebrated Afghanistan's Independence Day on Thursday by declaring it had beaten "the arrogant of power of the world" in the United States, but challenges to their rule ranging from running the country's frozen government to potentially facing armed opposition began to emerge (India Times, 2021b).

At the same time, U.S. diplomatic and military engagement has been erased from Afghan land after a historic agreement, but, after a complete withdrawal, the U.S. has to review its own mistake on the issue of how a military superpower has failed to achieve its goal. Instead of claiming a complete failure, it would be judicious to acknowledge that the hegemony of the West has been dragged down after this massive failure; furthermore, the worldwide criticism on America's failure shows a more antithetical view on democratic incompetence and regime change. Nothing would be altered through the narrow interpretation; after 20 years, the U.S. experiment has entirely failed in Afghanistan, but that failure cannot be treated as a failure of democratic governance. Militarisation of democracy, as we have been noticed, in Afghanistan by the U.S. signifies the Western Model of Democratic transition.

The Decline of Western Model and Humanitarian Crisis: An Afghan Way

The U.S. had a great vision to alter a short-term goal into long-term political stability, particularly in Afghanistan, for demonstrating Western responsibility to counter anti-democratic governments. But Afghanistan tells a slightly different story altogether; moreover, the entire U.S. military troops from Kabul and Airbases show a broader defeat of U.S.-led democratic transition and development. It may be attractive to think that promoting democracy in occupied foreign countries is a morally justified and effective path for restoring security and stability. But political reform is more successful when it originates from the local societies and political culture (Perliger, 2021).

From a humanitarian perspective, within 20 years, both Afghanistan and U.S. have lost their respective resources. Two decades of combat, trillions of dollars spent, tens of thousands of lives lost (Håkansson, 2021). After 20 years, the U.S. presence in Afghanistan has failed to establish any coherent and sustainable political structure with popular legitimacy (Perliger, 2021). Not only lives, but rather other
infrastructures and institutions were destroyed during the war between Afghan militancy and U.S. military force like public health, security, and so on. Afghan people, other than terrorist groups, have been experienced a great setback in terms of their living standards, education, political participation and domestic violence; therefore, it can be interpreted at this juncture that the longest war in Afghanistan has come up with a humanitarian crisis and horrible human rights abuses. Since 2001, Around 241,000 people have lost their lives from both Afghan and Pakistan war zone, out of this round figure, almost 72,000 civilians have died in this longest war through airstrikes, bombing and gunfire, though they were not enemy and responsible for Afghan war. In all, 2,455 U.S. service members were killed in the Afghanistan war (Crawford, 2021). Apart from this human loss, many Afghan people had suffered from low literacy, polluted drinking water, and environmental degradation. The biggest criticism before the American government would be the cost of the humanitarian crisis, for those innocent civilians who had sacrificed and lost their valuable lives without any wrongdoings.

The United States invaded Afghanistan 20 years ago with the hope of rebuilding a country that had become a scourge to the world and its own people (Acemoglu, 2021). Despite a strong military power and war strategy, the U.S. has been defeated after 20 years; this was not a common loss as history shows rather a more vibrant and humiliating defeat for the U.S. government. As has been considered earlier that the democratic transition would not be possible without a true leadership and guidance, but what we are seeing today is the crisis of leadership and guidance as expected from U.S.A. China’s foreign ministry has hit out at the United States over the Afghanistan-Taliban crisis, saying “democracy imposed and transplanted by others will not last or be firm” (Taskin, 2021). Forcing societies to embrace democratic practices can lead to political instability, conflict and a decline in citizens’ safety (Perliger, 2021). This was a comment on democratic universalism and the claim of U.S. foreign policy, since the end of cold war. Former diplomat of U.S.A, Henry Kissinger, argued that “It was not possible to turn the country into a modern democracy, but creative diplomacy and force might have overcome terrorism” (Kissinger, 2021). Military organizations are not equipped or trained to engage effectively in civilian-centred missions (Monten, 2014). The Machiavellian method has been failed like any means can’t be followed to achieve a noble goal and perpetual peace. Promoting stability is different from promoting democracy, and stability can in fact be present even under very undemocratic governments (Perliger, 2021). America’s dream has been flattered with widespread violence, human rights abuses, and Taliban-led anti-democratic government; neither stability nor democracy, U.S. mission in Afghanistan would be a long term failure for a superpower. Unfortunately, after two decades of building a strong, democratic, peaceful, and resilient Afghanistan remains a far-fetched dream (Shad & Iqbal, 2021).

At this juncture, the whole world is waiting for a speedy recovery of peace for Afghanistan, despite the withdrawal of the U.S. military stand-up. The democratization of the world is now under critical surveillance; after a massive rejection and defeat of U.S. supremacy, we are going to experience a new world order without any grant narrative or dominant narrative at the global level. Liberal democracy is no longer the best system of governance like one size fits for all.

**Conclusion**

Democratic consciousness, led by the USA, has been erased with the rise of religious fundamentalism in Afghanistan. After twenty years, the American troops have lost their legitimacy and left Afghanistan by giving power to the Taliban. The militarization of democracy should be stopped to promote true democracy through negotiation and consensus. Now we are going to new world order and a revision of Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations”. It will be a lesson for the USA, after horrible suffering in Afghanistan, to restrict herself from the future occupation of a foreign land with military means. The dominant narrative at the global level has been rejected after the rise of the Taliban; however, the biggest challenge before democratic transition would be the engagement diplomacy and reforms, rather than military occupation.
References


