Introduction

Afghanistan, from 19th century up to 2017, has been in the centre of conflict, war, maiming, genocide, famine and main point of contest in the world for international super powers. From United Kingdom and United States to Soviet Union and neighbouring countries, all of them have vested interests in Afghanistan for their own benefits. In this paper, you will find the answers to several questions: Why did United Kingdom attack Afghanistan? What was the reason for Soviet Union’s military invasion of Afghanistan? Why the United States and NATO involved in combating terrorism in the area? What are the real reasons for the protracted conflict in Afghanistan! What is the root causes of the conflict? Are the tribal areas in Pakistan which border Afghanistan further complicating the situation? Can we expect a successful resolution of the conflict to come from this region? A successful resolution of the problem in Afghanistan cannot happen, unless answers to all these questions are found. It is here that the youth of Afghanistan have a critical role to play, in terms of duties, responsibilities, as well as accountability.

Afghanistan

Apart from its strategic position in Asia, Afghanistan is an extremely rich country in its natural resources, with immense development capabilities. Still Afghanistan has not been able to grow and develop in various social, economic, education, security and technology segments. There are several reasons for this state of non-development:

1. The hard nature of Afghan terrain, most of it being mountainous and the lack of plain field;
2. No way or border with global waters;
3. No identification of sources of energy such as oil, gas and so on;
4. Racial and ethnic diversity, and as a result, harmful competition and numerous conflicts between religious and linguistic groups.

Perhaps the above factors/ issues are responsible for slowing down the development process, but when so many countries in the world with the same characteristics have been able to override them and pursue development, the above factors cannot be considered as the main reasons for non-development.

It must be emphasized that a critical factor which aggravated the situation and did not give a chance for the optimum utilization of resources in Afghanistan is the role of British imperialism and colonization of the country. Like in its other colonies, the British Empire systematically...
impoverished the country and drained it of its wealth in different sectors. Although Afghanistan gained independence from the British in 1919, which saw the resurrection of monarchy in the country, there was a nexus between them and the monarchy, which continued till the end of the Second World War. Subsequently, Afghanistan was drawn into the vortex of Cold War politics, which saw the involvement of both the Super Powers in the region, culminating in the Soviet invasion in 1979. It would not be wrong to state that the country has witnessed the direct political and military presence of three major world powers on its territory over the past three centuries.

From the 19th century up to the first half of the 20th century, the country was in the grip of the United Kingdom; from the second half of the 20th century, the Soviet Union established direct military presence; and in the first half of the 21st century, the United States has a direct military presence in Afghanistan. The intervention and role of all three major powers complicated the situation. Overall, the struggle between UK and Soviet Union in Afghanistan compromised the independence and sovereignty of the country which had a negative effect on the politics, economics and culture of the country. While internal factors cannot be ignored, the foreign factor played the most important role in the non-development of Afghanistan.

United Kingdom

When United Kingdom colonized India, Afghanistan was one of the threats for UK in India, because Ahmad Shah Baba and Zaman Shah had attacked India many times. The UK confronted the threat from Afghanistan side by planning multilateral policies for Afghanistan which had an effect on society, politics, economics and culture in Afghanistan for more than a century. The major elements of these policies were as follows:

1. Establishment of separation government between British colonies like India and Afghanistan. The British supported the Sikh government in Panjab especially the government of Ranjit Singh;
2. In the short term, they made a defence policy, signed an agreement against France with Iran and created tension between Iran and Afghanistan;
3. As a long-term measure, they made an offensive policy that led to the British military presence in Afghanistan. Thus, they had control on foreign policy of Afghanistan for several decades. When Russia came closer to Afghan borders, this policy became more sensitive. As a result of competition between Russia and British, triad war happened between Afghans and British.
4. Dissension policy between ethnic groups, between Tajiks and Pashtuns, between Hazaras and Tajiks, between Sunnite and Shiite and so on were the 4th part of British colonial policy in Afghanistan. We can still see the effects of this policy in Afghanistan.
5. Creating disagreement between Afghanistan and neighbourhood countries was the 5th part of British policy in Afghanistan.

In the midst of above policies of UK during 19th century and first half of 20th century in Afghanistan, British India and Afghanistan signed the Durand Line protocol. At the moment, Durand Line agreement is the main source of problem between Afghanistan and Pakistan. After the Second World War came to an end, Britain lost its power and the cold war started between two super powers, United States and Soviet Union.
Soviet Union

During the cold war and indirect battle between U.S and USSR, thousands of people have been killed. The scope of the war spread to many parts of the world; from Vietnam to Germany, from North and-South Korea to Afghanistan and from Afghanistan to the nuclear crisis of Cuba. Amidst all these, when the U.S established military ties with Pakistan in 1954, Afghanistan increasingly turned to the Soviet Union for support. After two and half decades, in late December 1979, Soviet airborne forces and ground troops totally 75 thousand military invaded Afghanistan. Soviet Union justified its military attack on Afghanistan based on three things:3

1. Afghanistan requested military help from us and we gave positive answer to this request;
2. Promise of Soviet government to help Afghanistan according to 1978 bilateral agreement;

Soviet government said Mr. Amin the King of Afghanistan was accused of collusion with foreign power for partition of Afghanistan. His government was overthrown by an internal revolution and military support of Soviet Union was the answer to the request of the new government in Afghanistan. But the world did not accept the allegation and justification of the Soviet Union. In this regard, the United Nations General Assembly, the Islamic Conference Organization, the League of Southeast Asian Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement announced their opposition to Soviet military attack on Afghanistan. All of them demanded from Soviet Union to go back from Afghanistan.4

Against Soviet Union, USA, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, UK and some other NATO members started supporting Mujahidin groups to fight against Soviet Union in Afghanistan. $500 million dollars per year and anti-aircraft and tank missiles (rockets "Stanger and Blueprint") were supplied to these groups. Finally the Soviet forces went back from Afghanistan on July 28, 1986. Mujahidin groups continued their fight against the Soviet-backed system until they took political power in 1992. Civil war happened by Mujahidin groups in Afghanistan, Kabul city was destroyed and thousands of people have been killed. Then the Taliban captured political power in 1996 in Afghanistan.5

The continuous conflicts that have occurred in the intervening time have killed or displaced millions of Afghans, while reducing much of the country to rubble. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington D.C, the United States launched a military operation that ousted the Taliban from power.

United States and NATO Members

After 9/11/2001 terrorist attacks, the United States and NATO members came to Afghanistan and launched their policy to re-build Afghanistan. Even after 17 years, Afghanistan still remains in the grip of conflict — its economy and its state institutions are weak. Also weak are the legitimacy of the present Afghan government, the confidence of the Afghan people in the international donor community, and their tolerance of foreign forces on their soil and national Afghan national force. Meanwhile, the United States and its coalition partners, following lengthy internal deliberations, are poised to implement a revised strategy in the face of a mounting insurgency in Afghanistan and waning domestic political support for their continued engagement there. At the same time, Afghanistan’s neighbours are eyeing these developments warily, girding themselves for a possible renewal of full-scale civil and proxy warfare. If we divide the problems, conflicts and war in Afghanistan into several phases, in every phase of war and conflict, foreign powers have
intensified the conflict by supporting one side against another. Now China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and others are helping the suspect groups against U.S, NATO members and India, resulting in a worse war that is currently going on in Afghanistan.

**Conflict in Afghanistan**

There is not “one” conflict in Afghanistan. Instead, the country can be seen as entangled in a whole “conflict net” made up of a large variety of different interests and disputes at the local, national and international levels. International conflicts that affect Afghanistan are the War on Terror, and the conflicts / tensions between (a) US and Iran, (b) Pakistan and India, (c) US, Russia and China, as well as (d) Saudi Arabia and Iran. Afghanistan is also affected by the conflict between the Pakistani government and pro-Taliban insurgents in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) close to the Afghan border. In addition, Afghanistan has a long-standing international conflict with Pakistan regarding the Durand Line, which in most parts, marks the border between the two countries. It is a very serious issue for Pakistan. By giving back the next side of Durand Line to Afghanistan, Pakistan would lose governmental authority over up to about half its territory.

At the national level, there is the well-known conflict over political power and international presence between the Taliban, ISIS and other insurgency groups on one side and the official Afghan government along with international military forces of the U.S and other NATO countries, on the other. Less known but of significant importance are the conflict(s) between different political and military parties and actors. There are numerous conflict potentials at the local level, including conflicts over access to resources (especially natural resources such as water and land), ethnic and regional tensions and differences between rural and urban areas. Beside the U.S and other NATO countries, Pakistan, India, Iran, Russia, China and, to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia, all play important roles in the area. Afghan actors active at the local level include different types of community councils, mullahs and elders who play important roles and also have their effect on the process.

**Figure 1: The international, national and local conflicts affecting Afghanistan.**

![Diagram showing various conflicts affecting Afghanistan](image)
Figure 2: International Conflict affecting Afghanistan (Conflict mapping)\textsuperscript{7}

![Conflict Mapping Diagram](image1)

Figure 3: ISAF RC and PRT Locations.\textsuperscript{8}

![ISAF RC and PRT Locations Map](image2)
Root Causes of Conflict

1. On the political level, Afghanistan struggles with the effects of bad governance. Behind different kind of corruption, the political factors are the instruments of ethnicity, religion and regionalism which are utilized to mobilize their followers.

2. On the social level, there is very high illiteracy and a lack of employment training. Behind illiteracy and lack of skills, an explosive growth in population is also going on.

3. Economically and environmentally, Afghanistan faces a growing shortage of natural resources such as water, arable land, pastures and wood, in combination with the fact that 80% of the population depends on agriculture.

4. Unemployment is high which makes people more receptive to offers of payment from criminal/opposition groups. Insurgency and government corruption are significantly supported by revenues from the drug economy in Afghanistan.

5. Security-related factors, national security forces, especially the police, are weak and in many cases negatively affected by corruption.

6. Due to unequal access to resources, there is a huge divide between the top dogs and underdogs.

Experiences of Conflict

Three decades of war created a lot of problems for us. Many migrated to Pakistan and Iran, our houses were destroyed, our land and property were grabbed by warlords, the economy was badly affected, our sons and daughters were deprived of education, our mothers were insulted… schools, hospitals, roads and factories were destroyed and fear of war has caused many mental problems. In the years of conflict that followed, more than 870,000 Afghans were killed, three million were maimed or wounded, a million were internally displaced and over five million were forced to flee the country.

Tribal areas of Pakistan and World Terrorism

Reading of this real story will give one a clear image that terrorism is never going to end. A family, like all the families that existed there, included almost a dozen children. The father’s income was not enough to feed them, let aside educating them or providing them with other facilities of life. But the head of the family was sure that even if one of his sons was gifted and he should be educated, his dreams were always discouraged by his poor financial condition.

Then he heard of a “Madrasa” in a bigger town where children were not only given free education but they were also provided with free food and residence. Father happily sent his child to the madrasa dreaming of bright days of future when his son would change the fate of the family. As he did not have enough money to travel and visit his son, the gap between his visits kept increasing. In one of his visits, he was informed that his son had left the place and he was not to be found anywhere. The sad father returned home with a heavy heart.

In one of such madrasas, a so-called religious scholar was busy in brainwashing the young and teenage students with extremism and need of ‘Jihad’ against the infidels and all those who support these infidels. He was having a good supply of all those orphan-like kids who were left in the madrasa by their poor and helpless parents who were happy that at least their children were getting enough to eat. The environment was absolutely conducive for such brain-washing.
There were such books that children were given free, their motivating teacher was present with them all the time, telling them the sad and adrenaline-boosting stories of how their brothers were being killed brutally by the cruel enemy and they were shown how they would be rewarded in the hereafter, if they presented themselves in this holy war. After efforts of years, these young minds willingly presented themselves to sacrifice their lives and be successful in this world and earn paradise in the eternal life. Then we heard of a suicide attack that killed dozens of people, without any discrimination of enemy or friend.

This fact can also be understood from the areas where militancy is on the rise. The tribal areas of Pakistan, border provinces of Afghanistan where poverty and illiteracy are very high, and other similar places around the world - all show a similar trend of poverty, illiteracy and flagrant militancy and supply of arms responsible for this problem. Thus, less development, poverty, lack of infrastructure and lawlessness left thousands of families with struggle to earn their livelihood. The result of this situation is violence and suicide-attack. First there were Taliban, then came Al-Qaeda, then came Haqqani network, then ISIS and this series is not going to end here, there may be many more offspring of this.10

Billions of dollars have been spent on drones and missile attacks. Military interference in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq in the name of uprooting terrorism has changed nothing. One thing is for sure; with the death of every innocent citizen in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan or Pakistan, the hate and anger rises in the area. Instead of one Bin Laden and Mullah Omer, now we have thousands of Bin Ladens and Mullah Omers. Instead of decrease, we are the witness to an increase in terrorism.

**Combating terrorism through non-violence is the only means of moving forward**

The term ‘Violence spreads violence’ was used by Johan Galtung in the second half of the 20th century. He believed that with violence, we cannot remove violence. Solutions to violence and war cannot be found without addressing the root causes. It looks like medicine given by doctors to a sick person, without finding the root cause of sickness. Based on our three century experience, we are convinced that force and military might, will not help us to reach our goals. Instead, social justice, humanity, love, truth, sharing, caring, spiritual values, equal access to resource, removing deprivation, negotiation and path of non-violence are the only ways that can help us to have peaceful life in the future.

Our teacher Ms. **SWARNA RAJAGOPALAN** in “Women, Peace and Security” online course said: a hungry man always will be an angry man. It means that poverty is interlinked with violence and war, so equal access to resources will help us to end the violence. We need to carry out all the possible steps to boost up economic activities so that financial condition of people and area may improve and people start living a decent life, without considering terrorism or falling victim to the terror groups for earning a few hundred dollars in a month.

**Youth Responsibility: Conflict Resolution and Peace-building**

The new generation of Afghanistan appears to have understood that achieving negative peace may be easy as compared with positive peace which is complex and difficult but not impossible. We know that conflict resolution and peacebuilding process in our country needs a genuine and legitimate government; active participation of all citizens; constructive support of all partners; multiple work by majority of the citizens; focus on the grassroots of ethnic and religious conflict; negotiation in short, medium and long term with peace plan to end the war and make the situation to move from negative peace to positive peace. Support of religious persons (clergy/Mullas) are essential; enhancement and promotion of the values of positive peace by citizens will be helpful; government needs to work honestly to remove the roots of violence; media, schools, civil society, and religious institutions should understand the values of peace. Each of them need to promote a
culture of peace. The concepts of freedom, justice and pluralism have the potential to do this. We are working hard in different parts to build our society like other nations, especially in the area of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, which is more needed now a days. Among many active organizations in the country, we are also working as volunteers for our society.

Youth Peace Leaders Organization activities
We need peace. Afghans have seen the worst wars and worst periods. Now all Afghans are tired of war and conflict. We need peace to educate our children and have a good life. We are striving to build peace in our society in the following ways:

1. Peacebuilding workshops are continuously going on for the university students;
2. Publications (The Jewel of Peace) and Peace activities are being reported in social media;
3. Planting of peace trees in different schools and universities;
4. Recognition of honest personalities in the society, appreciate them and recommend them as good models of improvement through interview and publication.
5. Donating to those members of organizations who have serious economic problems;
6. “Peace and Empathy story” program for children;
7. Celebrating the International Day of Peace every year;
8. Travelling to different provinces and out of the country for learning purpose;
9. Celebrating the World Science Day for peace and development;
10. Giving interviews to TV channels to pass the message of peace to the people; and so on.

Conclusion: madness of people in Afghanistan (using bullet against brotherhood); bad morality of local and international powers (giving the bullet to suspect groups); the consequence (genocide, killing, maiming, disability, poverty, economic sanction and so on); solution (social justice, non-violence, negotiation, loving, re-build of culture and social sharing).

These tasks may be very small in comparison to exiting problems in our society, but whatever we are doing is based on promoting human values. I must state that we are proud of our volunteer work for Afghan society.

I believe that only we are responsible for our country and we have to make, build and improve it. No one else can do it for us. At the end, I would like to say that we are grateful to all countries that are honestly cooperating with us. Based on our national interest, we want to have good and friendly relations with all countries.

Notes

1. Dr. Yusuf Matuly, Investigate the colonist policy of British in Afghanistan, p 2-3-6, 2009.

5. https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%87%DB%8C%DA%AF%DB%8C%DA%87%DA%96_%D8%A7%DB%8C%DA%97%DB%8C%DA%97%DA%96-1992-1391
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2. BACKGROUNDER ON AFGHANISTAN: HISTORY OF THE WAR, PDF.
4. Dr. Yusuf Matuly, Investigate the colonist policy of British in Afghanistan, p 2-3-6, 2009.

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