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## Dedication

I dedicate this work sincerely:

For the sake of Allah, my Creator, and my Master, My great teacher and messenger,  
*Mohammed* (May Allah bless and grant him), who taught us the purpose of life.

To my dearly beloved parents, *Lounis Allaoua, Maghmouli Samia* who inspired me to  
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## **Abstract**

America's worst nightmare became a reality on September 11, 2001, when an organized terrorist attack occurred in New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Since then, the United States has committed to combating terrorism under the banner of the "Global War on Terror." For such a war, the US needed to develop a number of new policies, both to ensure domestic security and to prevent future terrorist acts globally. This study deals with US policies in post 9\11 attacks: assessing US Nation-Building efforts in Afghanistan and aims to demonstrate how the United States dealt with or responded to these domestic terrorist attacks, as well as how these incidents sparked significant counter-terrorism efforts in the United States and marked George W. Bush's presidency. Furthermore, the study also aims to explore the real motives and objectives of the US intervention in the Middle East particularly in Afghanistan. Then, to evaluate US efforts to rebuild Afghanistan during the Bush and Obama administrations, and assess its efforts after US withdrawal. It will be justified through the research that with the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan, neither war on terror nor this building nation policy ended on the terms America wanted.

## ملخص

في 11 سبتمبر 2001 أصبحت أسوأ كوابيس أمريكا حقيقة واقعة عندما وقع هجوم إرهابي منظم في نيويورك وبنسلفينيا و فيرجينيا، و منذ ذلك الحين التزمت الولايات المتحدة بمكافحة الإرهاب تحت شعار "الحرب العالمية على الإرهاب". لمثل هذه الحرب كان على الولايات المتحدة إن تتبنى عدد من السياسات الجديدة لضمان الأمن الداخلي، و إعاقة أي أعمال إرهابية في المستقبل على مستوى العالم. تتناول هذه الدراسة سياسات الولايات المتحدة فيما بعد هجمات 11 سبتمبر و كذلك تقييم الحرب الأمريكية في أفغانستان، كما تهدف إلى توضيح كيفية تعامل الولايات المتحدة أو الرد على هذه الهجمات الإرهابية ضف إلى ذلك كيف أثارت هذه الحادثة جهود كبيرة لمكافحة الإرهاب في الولايات المتحدة و ميزت رئاسة جورج بوش، علاوة على ذلك تهدف الدراسة أيضا إلى استكشاف الدوافع و الأهداف الحقيقية للتدخل الأمريكي في الشرق الأوسط و خاصة في أفغانستان، ثم تقييم الجهود الأمريكية لإعادة بناء أفغانستان خلال إدارتي بوش و اوباما و تقييم جهودها بعد الانسحاب الأمريكي سيبرر البحث انه مع انسحاب الولايات المتحدة من أفغانستان لا الحرب على الإرهاب و لا سياسة بناء الدولة انتهت بالشروط التي تريدها أمريكا.

**List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

AF-PAK	Afghanistan-Pakistan
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
IS-K	Islamic State Khorasan
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSS	National Security Strategy
OAS	Organization of American States
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PRTs	Provincial Reconstruction Teams
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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## **Introduction**

September 11, 2001, is a date that America will never forget; the event stunned not only the country but also the entire world. Four Airplanes hijacked by an extremist terror group collided with both towers of the World Trade Center in New York, causing a tragedy. The attacks caused more than 3,000 deaths. Aside from this huge number of casualties, there also has been a lot of devastation. The terror acts led to a significant counter-terrorism effort by the United States. Also had a major impact on George W. Bush's presidency.

In the aftermath of the Attacks President George W. Bush devised new measures and policies both militarily and politically to ensure domestic security in the United States. Furthermore, President Bush declared a comprehensive plan to track down and eliminate terrorists worldwide, which is a global military campaign against terrorism known as the "Global War on Terror". The campaign's primary targets were terrorist organizations around the world, with Al-Qaeda being the most visible. The war on terror's military component included international battles in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as other policies are taken to prevent terrorist financing and safe haven. The first processes of the GWOT saw the prevention of additional large-scale terrorist attacks on American soil, the overthrow of the Taliban regime, the closure of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, and the assassination of several top Al-Qaeda members.

Moreover, the longer the war on terrorism continued and as the administration changed, the greater the US ambitions became and revealed new objectives, particularly in the Middle East and Central Asia regions. President Barack Obama, who took office in 2009, declared the continuation of the US mission in Afghanistan with newer policies, as well as hidden objectives that are becoming more visible over time. Analysts argued that America's counterterrorism campaign's failures exceeded its accomplishments and that the attacks in Afghanistan and Iraq had risen anti-Americanism and harmed the country's image. While

Others claimed that the global war on terror was a ruse to cover up the pursuit of a broader US geopolitical objective which included controlling global reserves of oil, expanding the country's international troop presence, and trying to counter the significant challenge posed by various major rivals, in order to be the only hegemonic power.

Afghanistan, as a vital country in the region, has always been a victim of major power conflicts. The country was and continues to be one of those regions that the world's mightiest powers target. The US involvement in other regions was justified as a promotion of democracy. This idea, however, is dubious. Some scholars believe it was only used to justify declaring war on specific countries for unrevealed objectives. The study deals with America's geopolitical competition with countries such as China and Russia. As well as how outcomes in places such as Afghanistan affected global perceptions of US power, influence, and credibility.

The primary aim of this research is to paint a clear picture of how the 9/11 attacks undermined the world's most powerful nation, as well as to examine US post-9/11 policies in relation to Afghanistan and the surrounding region. As well as how these incidents sparked significant counter-terrorism efforts in the United States and marked George W. Bush's presidency. The study further seeks to investigate the potential objectives of these US policies, primarily those related to strategic and economic dominance in Central Asia and the Middle East. Then, the study aims to evaluate US efforts to rebuild Afghanistan during the Bush, and Obama administrations, and assess its efforts after US withdrawal.

Nearly 20 years later, on August 30, and with the withdrawal of the US military from Afghanistan and Taliban control of the presidential palace, the Afghan government fell, which the US supported and contributed to by combating the Taliban and building a self-sustaining Afghan democracy. Demonstrating that America's policies were a complete failure at a tremendous cost in lives and treasure. This study is significant in terms of

analyzing and understanding the efficiency of US Policies after the 9\11 attacks, primarily during the bush and Obama administration, and exploring the US interests behind those policies. The research also gives an idea about the effects of these policies on the Middle East mainly on Afghanistan.

The topic of America's reaction to the domestic attacks and the US policies following 9/11 has generated a wide range of opinions among scholars and researchers and has been extensively discussed in books and articles. In their book, *The Long Shadow of 9/11: America's Response to Terrorism*, Jenkins and Godges provide explanations for the shortcomings in the US immediate policies to the 9/11 incidents, which included overthrowing the Taliban regime and depriving Al Qaeda of hideouts in Afghanistan. They also state how the United States was concerned with finding a balance in its policies because it is critical to protect the US image and American values.

The central focus of this study is to examine how the United States used the 9/11 attacks to justify its intervention in the Middle East, employing a variety of policies and actions, and whether or not they were successful. In the article titled *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Arab Spring: Balancing Values and Interests*, Pierre M. Atlas presents qualitative research that discusses how the United States has competed to become the hegemonic power in the Middle East region since the cold war, and how the 9/11 attacks provided the perfect opportunity to approach the region. According to the article, the majority of US interventions in the region are done to improve the US's sphere of influence, and the desire for oil, and the humanitarian component is used as an instrument for that.

In his article *Central Asia in the context of Western and Russian Interests*, Rakhimov Mirzokhid asserts that historically, the region has always been the focus of various empires and states, and one could argue that the region has been in a Great Game situation at some point in its history. As well as how the geopolitical situation in Central Asia has shifted

dramatically as major powers such as the United States, Russia, and China have expressed strong interest in the region. Rakhimov also offers numerous contributing factors to modern Central Asia's importance in the world. The accessibility of rich energy resources in Central Asia and the Caspian region is one; the geopolitical position, surrounded by powers such as Russia, China, India, and Iran is another.

For the construction of this research, the qualitative method is used because it allows for the exploration of various descriptions, illustrations, and critical thoughts discussed by analysts and political scientists about the research topic, with the aim of assessing the US policies in Afghanistan. Furthermore, a historical approach is required to examine the development of the "War on Terror". Finally, because the study examines a few selected speeches, discourse analysis is employed. These are the main approaches used to meet the goals of this research study.

This work is to be divided into three chapters, in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter is titled "US Policies in Post 9/11 Attacks, the Global War on Terror". It investigates Bush's counterterrorism program with both aspects militarily and politically. "The Obama Administration and the New War on Terror," is the title of the second chapter, which focuses on how President Obama's policies differ from his predecessor's. As well as to investigate America's real motives for the war in Afghanistan. The third chapter "Assessment of the United States War in Afghanistan" is about assessing US efforts in Afghanistan, and its withdrawal as well as the cause for its failure.

## Chapter One

### US Global War on Terror

#### 1. Prelude to 9\11 Attacks and Al Qaeda

On September 11, 2001, Americans awoke with utter horror because of terrorist assaults on their soil. The United States was struck by a series of unprecedented attacks. A first plane smashed into the World Trade Center at 8:46 a.m., and at the moment, Americans assumed it was an accident. However, when a second plane targeted the Southern Trade Center Tower, which collapsed soon after. It was proven that this was not the case (Bailey et al. 1). At around 9:37 a.m., a third plane hit Washington, D.C., targeting the Pentagon. The last plane, which was directed toward either the White House or the US Capitol, crashed into a field in Pennsylvania, where the passengers attempted but failed to retake the cockpit (2). The hijacking of the four commercial flights was carried out by a group of nineteen Al Qaeda-affiliated men, fifteen Saudis, two from the United Arab Emirates, one from Lebanon, and one from Egypt.

As soon as the two first planes were crushed, the first investigation began. The investigators proposed a vast number of possibilities, such as a problem with the planes or a flaw in the US's flight controls. However, the notion of a terrorist attack was not even considered. With the third airplane crash, however, it was quickly evident that America was under attack. At the time, President Bush was in Sarasota, Florida, visiting a classroom of second graders at an elementary school (Bamford 14). Bush was informed that the United States was under attack while he was still there. At the same time, the President made a one-minute address to the country stating, "terrorism against our nation will not stand." (qtd. in Baily et al. 82). People from all

across the world were watching the happenings at the time. Some were in a state of shock, while others were in a state of horror.

These targets were symbolic, indicating global capital and American military power, yet they had real-world consequences, complicating the airlines, industries in downtown New York, and the world's economy as a whole through stock market closures in the United States and elsewhere, as well as subsequent market slowdowns (Kellner 4). In addition to a large number of fatalities, over 3,000 people were killed, including hundreds of lifeguards, making it the deadliest terrorist attack on American soil (Kean and Hamilton 311). Without a doubt, the 9/11 terrorist attacks aimed at the heart of the United States grand strategy, which always sought to preserve its territories as well as the interests of its citizens.

### **1.1. Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden**

In late December 1979, a group of young Muslim men from different parts of the world flew to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet occupation (Bailey et al. 28). Osama bin Laden, a Saudi young man, and Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian doctor, created al Qaeda in 1988. It was dedicated to fighting for the sake of God (25). They sponsored, organized, and supported financially training camps, especially in Afghanistan, where they had a huge influence. The same camps were used to plan the assaults on the United States. Bin Laden used his huge personal fortune to support the Taliban in exchange for protection. Since Osama bin Laden and his Islamic group Al-Qaeda had previously been involved in terrorist attacks against America, it was proven that the 9/11 events were carried out by them. As Al-Qaeda provided the personnel, funds, and logistical support needed to carry out the operation.

Furthermore, according to the National Commission's report on Al Qaeda's September 2001 attacks, which contains crucial data about the 9/11 attacks, including



intelligence information received during interrogations of Al Qaeda members, the 9/11 attacks were first conceptualized by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, a highly educated Kuwaiti citizen from Baluchistan (Pakistan). In 1993, he contributed to financing the World Trade Center bombing, which was carried out by his nephew Ramzi Yousef, who was detained in the Philippines two years later. On the other hand, Khalid Sheik Mohammed traveled to Afghanistan and remained free, where he introduced to Bin Laden several plans for operations against the US, including the 9/11 attacks. Nevertheless, Bin Laden did not give his approval to his plan to attack the US until late 1998 or early 1999 (Kean and Hamilton 145-49). Moreover, he also made possible suicide bombers viewable to Khalid Sheik Mohammed. Ziad Jarrah, Marwan al Shehhi, Ramzi Binalshibh, and Mohamed Atta, were the new volunteers. The four men lived in Hamburg and were known for their vehement anti-American views (157-60). They traveled to Afghanistan in late 1999, where they swear loyalty to Osama bin Laden, and were immediately selected for the operation (164-66). On September 11, 2001, following extensive planning and preparation, plane operations began. The four commercial planes were all hijacked synchronously, and crashed tragically, impacting the lives of many people all over the world (1-4).

It was clear that Bin Laden and Al Qaeda have always been hostile to the United States as a whole. They wanted to demonstrate that America is not as powerful as it appears. Thus, the primary objectives of Al Qaeda from these attacks were that they disapproved of US military involvement in the Gulf War and Operation Restore Hope in Somalia. In general and especially, Al Qaeda rejected the continued presence of US military forces in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East. Besides, they rejected the US's support for the Jewish and the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Eventually, Bin Laden and Al Qaeda members proclaimed war on the US in 1996. (Bailey et al. 82) These were the three main objectives sought by Al Qaeda.

## **2. The United States Counterterrorism Program**

### **2.1. Identifying the Threat and Choosing the Weapons**

Following the September 11th attacks, it was apparent that George W. Bush's administration chose to respond promptly and strongly to the atrocious acts of terrorism conducted against their country. "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them," Bush stated on September 11 at 8:30 p.m. in a national address (qtd. in Woodward 26). Directly afterward September 11, pro-American sentiment reached an all-time high (Collier 1). Many nations have expressed their support some out of solidarity, others out of worry; undoubtedly, a large portion of the world felt constantly threatened as a result of his speech.

Terrorists would not be able to stand for long, according to President Bush's address to the nation. The Bush administration's response to the situation included both overseas military action and domestic defense measures, the 9/11 attacks provided a clear focus for the Bush presidency: to protect the American people at home whilst also defeating terrorism abroad. The attacks were, according to him, indeed an act of war, but his priority at the time was to handle the prompt situation before mounting a serious military response (Gregg II). Thus, it was crucial to identify the threat first, and that is precisely what happened: the enemy was successfully recognized; the federal government declared a group of Islamic terrorists called Al-Qaeda to be the primary perpetrator of the attacks (Bollyn 14). President George W. Bush announced to the entire world that Al Qaeda attacked America because they despised the country's democratic liberties (236). On September 20th, President Bush

presented the Taliban leadership in Afghanistan with a set of non-negotiable demands, to hand over to the US all Al Qaeda officials who are hiding in the country, where Bin Laden had plotted the operations (Bailey et al. 3).

## **2.2.The USA Political Reaction to 9\11**

### **2.2.1. The Bush Doctrine**

Bush believed that the threat of US authority had lost its credibility among terrorists. Thus, The Bush administration announced new political strategies in response to the terrorist attacks almost immediately after they occurred. As a result, very immediately after the terrorist attacks, the Bush administration unveiled new political strategies. After the 9/11 incident, President Bush delivered a speech in which he stated that America's vision and policies needed to change because the new danger is distinct in substance and approach (*"Selected Speeches"* 68). President Bush recognized the need for additional strengthening of a robust domestic security policy and proposed the creation of a new ministerial agency.

Undoubtedly, the events of 9/11 had a serious influence on US foreign policy; the attacks ushered in new policies. When they are combined, they form what has become known as the Bush Doctrine. The attacks reintroduced foreign policy to the front line of American politics and the presidency, albeit with minor changes. As previously stated, the attacks influenced US foreign policy; additionally, the Bush administration devised new political strategies based on the neoconservative vision that emerged in the 1990s (McKeever and Davies 355). President Bush stated in early 2003 "after September 11, the doctrine of containment just doesn't hold any water. My vision shifted dramatically after September 11, because I now realize the stakes, I realize the world has changed" (qtd. in Jervis 372).

Bush's new Doctrine consisted of four major components. Firstly, regime change, which is the belief derived after the 9\11 attacks, implies that some Middle Eastern regimes must be changed, even if it meant resorting to military force. Such attempts to help solve a crisis by removing the leaders of an implacable country are littered throughout US foreign policy history. Secondly, pre-emption, which holds that the United States should not wait to be attacked before intervening to disrupt and defeat terrorists and any other region that poses a threat. If the president believes that a significant threat may exist in the future, an American attack is justified. Thirdly, unilateralism, which asserts that the United States has the authority to act unilaterally if necessary, with no outside permission required for the US to start a war.

Finally, U.S. supremacy denotes that the United States authority has a significant impact on a variety of global spheres, notably militarily. In terms of politics, the Bush Doctrine was the cornerstone of the American response to the 9/11 attacks, which called for pre-emptive strikes. The United States is now active on a worldwide basis, as it was during the Cold War, and is determined to deal with challenges wherever they come (McKeever and Davies 356).

### **2.2.2. The National Security Strategy**

Every president since 1986 has been required to submit an annual National Security Strategy, which is a formal document on a regular basis by the executive branch of the United States that outlines national security issues as well as how the government intends to address them. The NSS also reflects a government's policy for the organized use of all military and non-military tools of state power to undertake goals that protect and expand its national interest (Doyle 2).

In addition to the Bush doctrine and in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 the White House issued The National Security Strategy on September 17, 2002, which is a report

outlining the three primary purposes of the Global War on. The document outlined the main elements of the Bush Doctrine such as the need to move from the old Cold War deterrence doctrine to a preventive effort to align strategy with the challenges of the current situation, where the threat is most likely to come from a terrorist group like Al-Qaeda Terror (National Security Strategy Report)

The NSS appears to be appropriate considering the nature and amplitude of the threats, which have surfaced, in the post-September 11th international context. Initially, the NSS advocates for pre-emptive military intervention against warring countries and terrorist organizations aiming to expand atomic weapons. Furthermore, the NSS proclaimed that the US will preserve its worldwide status and power and that no foreign entity will be able to challenge its global military might. Lastly, the NSS declares its intention to spread human rights and democracy throughout the world, particularly in Muslim countries. To put it another way, it emphasized the sustaining of the USA's international standing through a variety of methods, including military, diplomatic, and economic (Lieber K. and Leiber R).

### **2.2.3. The USA PATRIOT Act**

The USA PATRIOT Act is a historic Act of the United States Congress that has been passed into law by George Bush on October 26, 2001. The official name of this Act is “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism”. It was passed in response to the 9/11 attacks, with the declared purpose of significantly strengthening US national security, especially in relation to international terrorists. The USA PATRIOT Act's primary goal is to prevent and prosecute terrorist acts in the US, as well as to strengthen law enforcement investigative capabilities. It seeks to boost US efforts to identify, investigate, and punish global terrorist financing, among other things. The act also

empowers the FBI and CIA to use new investigation tactics against domestic and international terrorists, as well as heavier punishments for terrorist offenses (PATRIOT Act).

The Act was critical in the fight against terrorism and in making Americans safer. It focused on four major areas that have had the most impact. First, the PATRIOT Act provided the federal government with the ability to better understand what terrorists may be planning and share information to prevent future attacks (Report from the Field: The USA PATRIOT Act at Work 2). Second, the law also called for stronger criminal laws against terrorism, namely stronger penalties for planning and participating in terrorist attacks, and support for terrorists (9). Third, The Act would hugely enhance the effectiveness to interrupt and eliminate terrorist organizations by removing barriers to investigating terrorism (15). Finally, by presenting modern tools to battle terrorists using contemporary methods of communication, the Act has modernized instruments required for missions against terrorism (18). The USA PATRIOT Act included these new enhancements to better combat terrorism against the nation's terrorist adversaries.

#### **2.2.4. The 9\11 Commission**

Formally known as the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States Is a nonpartisan separate committee established by congressional law and President George Bush's signature in late 2002. The committee's mission is to compile a comprehensive assessment of the events terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, from the plotting of the attacks to the response of the U.S. This Commission is also tasked with making suggestions, as well as measures to prevent future attacks. Former New Jersey governor Thomas Kean and former congressman representative Lee

Hamilton agreed to head the commission, which was formed up of five Republicans and five Democrats.

The Commission issued its comprehensive report on July 22, 2004, which was prepared by an experienced team led by Philip Zelikow. Upon countless interviews and a detailed investigation of thousands of confidential and unclassified reports, the report was released. The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States was issued as a result of the findings. In the report, there is a detailed account of Al Qaeda's attacks and the national security systems' responses to the assaults as they occurred, .as well as details about the evolution of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden's leadership, and its transformation into the group which conducted the 9/11 attacks. In addition to addressing previous al-Qaeda assaults on American territory prior to September 11, 2001. The participation of foreign entities in the conspiracy and the attacks was also closely examined. Notably, however, it determined that Iraq seemed to have no involvement in the actions, and it was not a part of the al-Qaeda organization, however, it was found that Pakistan had a significant contribution to the rise of Islamist extremism. In addition to some signs of Iran's connection to al-Qaeda and advised that more investigations were essential. The report finally claimed that the CIA and FBI had under-estimated al-Qaeda's threats and had taken insufficient actions to impede its preparations. The commission eventually closed on August 21, 2004 (*9/11 Commission Report*).

### **3. Bush's Global War on Terror**

Prior to September 11, the USA was not ready for such preventive operation and a long-term military campaign against a certain terrorist organization, or the declaration of a global war. In a military sense, the Bush administration's counter-

terrorism strategy was officially introduced in October 2001, as part of the American Grand Strategy, with the initiation of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), which was the official title utilized by the US government for the Global War on Terror campaign (GWOT). The strategic choice was made to treat counterterrorism as a war. According to the United States, the effort has three equally important components: "military, diplomatic, and humanitarian." Its military objectives were to kill Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, as well as to take military action against the Taliban regime. In terms of diplomacy, the United States stressed the "coalition of support" from governments all around the world. It aimed to help refugees on a humanitarian level. Bush also promised that the US would help individuals in need with food and medicine ("Operation Enduring Freedom"<sup>12</sup>). The GWOT, on the other hand, was unlike any other conflict America had ever faced since it pitted them against a difficult-to-identify and-fight opponent. Furthermore, in this case, the enemy does not belong to a single location and does not have a particular force against which to fight. As a result, the position in the United States became even more difficult (Bellazi 26).

### **3.1. The U.S. War in Afghanistan**

On the 20th of September 2001, President George Bush declared the War on Terror in an address to Congress and the public, stating, "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated" ("Selected Speeches" 68). He emphasized clearly that the US's purpose is to destroy not only Al Qaeda but also every terrorist network in the world. However, The US would dedicate itself to reducing innocent fatalities or destruction of civilian properties while conducting these operations. Following five days, on September 25, Secretary Of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declared OEF (Bailey et al. 57). The military campaign, which he predicted



would take years to combat. General Tommy Franks, the general in chief of Central Command and a former army soldier who served in both the Vietnam and Gulf wars, led the campaign. As a first step, the war in Afghanistan began with the goal of removing the Taliban from power as they refused to hand over Al Qaeda. Between 07 and 28 October, the initial stages of the battle primarily entail US airstrikes in locations where the governing Taliban was supposedly sheltering Al-Qaeda leadership, including Osama bin Laden (45). The presence of UK forces in the airstrikes has been confirmed. Over 3,000 bombs and missiles were deployed during that time, and over 200 pre-planned targeted zones were chosen. Kandahar, Kabul, Jalalabad, and Mazar-e-Sharif were the primary targets. During the airstrike on these targets, the US stated to have employed cluster bombs against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Cluster ammunition is a weapon made up of many explosive sub ammunitions. They are fired from planes, which then explode in mid-air, delivering tens or hundreds of rounds of bombs (“Operation Enduring Freedom”18).

Both nationally and internationally, the war in Afghanistan gained considerable support. NATO declared the US strike to constitute an attack on all NATO members. A few days later, most countries announced their support including Turkey, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, France, and Poland have all declared troop deployments in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the US Congress passed a resolution empowering President George Bush to take all reasonable and proper measures against any groups or individuals who plotted, carried out, or cooperated in any manner with the attacks. Given the potential of international assistance, Bush opted to go to war alone. This choice demonstrated American military power, and the US did not require military cooperation or assistance to achieve its goals. (“Operation Enduring Freedom”05).

Following its defeat at Mazar-e-Sharif, the Taliban regime began to crumble significantly, alongside its strongholds. As a further move, the US launches a ground invasion of Kandahar following massive bombings, Kabul fell on November 13, 2001. In December 2001, after tracing al-Qaida leader Bin Laden, the perpetrator of the September 11 attacks, the US-led coalition struck the White Mountains cavern at Tora Bora, Afghanistan, near the country's eastern border with Pakistan, where it was suspected he was sheltering out in the caves. The two-week conflict lasted from December 3 to 17, leading to a hundred fatalities as well as Bin Laden's successful escape to Pakistan (“Operation Enduring Freedom”<sup>14</sup>).

The US was dominant during the first three months of the war, they detained around 7,000 Taliban forces and killed approximately 4,000 more. US troops destroyed some Al Qaeda operations and disrupted their capacity to operate globally by approximately 30% (Conetta 6). The United States military superiority was in evidence when the Taliban were thrown from power in Afghanistan on December 9, 2001; about two months after the conflict began. However, the main challenge for the US in Afghanistan began then, and it is to start the government transition by maintaining the country and establishing a democratic system of governance (McKeever and Davies 358). On December 5, 2001, a temporary government was formed by the United Nation, and Hamid Karzai was appointed as provisional government leader during a conference in Bonn, Germany, furthermore, an international peacekeeping force was established to manage peace in Kabul. The United States intention at the time was to transform Afghanistan into a democratic regime that would not sustain terrorism as well as provide it with at least the ability to carry out its constitutional responsibilities (359).

### **3.1.1. Operation Anaconda**

By March 2, 2002, the US and coalition troops became thoroughly set up in the country, while numerous military actions had taken place, with further operations anticipated. Operation Anaconda, the first serious military attack and the biggest operation since Tora Bora, was among those anticipated missions. It was launched southeast of Zurmat in the Shahi-Kot Valley and Arma Mountains, its aim was to eliminate and arrest Qaeda and Taliban forces in mountainous locations (Midla 01). Around 2,000 international forces participated in the operation, notably 200 special operations forces from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, France, Norway, New Zealand, and Afghan partners. Given its scale, Anaconda did not actually constitute a significant expansion of the military response or a major success. Rather, the US started diverting military focus away from Afghanistan and more towards Iraq, which was portrayed as a serious danger to the United States in the "war on terror." On May 1, 2003, United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced the end of "major combat" and indicated that it was time for reconstruction (Geibel 72-73).

### **3.1.2. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)**

Despite the fact that the US solely targeted the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda, innocent civilians were not spared. Certainly, Afghanistan's war imposed immense suffering on a population resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people. Residential neighborhoods, military hospitals, and schools, as well as a Red Cross warehouse, were all bombed. In August of 2003 by gaining operational responsibility of the United Nations International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, NATO aimed to reconstruct the state by protecting the Afghan people's human rights and implementing established regulations. The international military mission consisted of three phases, the first from 2003 to 2004, German and French troops led efforts

throughout northern Afghanistan. Secondly, it was carried to western Afghanistan in 2005, having Spanish and Italian troops taking the lead. Finally, between July and October of 2006, the third and fourth stages of ISAF's deployment in the whole country started (Gallis 3). The mission, on the other hand, was badly coordinated and caused numerous issues. There was a sort of misunderstanding between the nations. Additionally, some states declined to deploy troops, while others believed that more forces were required (Roberts 22).

### **3.2. Operation Iraqi Freedom**

Later, in the aftermath of the 9-11 attacks and the Afghanistan war. A new conflict erupted under the same name of "War on Terror", where Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, tried to convince President Bush that Iraq, rather than Afghanistan, should have been America's first priority in the war on terror, given the possibility that Saddam Hussein was involved in the attack. As a result, the US invasion of Iraq began on March 20, 2003, with the assumption that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (McKeever and Davies 358). The Iraqi president employed weapons of mass destruction during the battle against Iran. In fact, in 1989, Saddam simply stated that Iraq had WMD in a speech. "If Israel attacks any Arab country we have the means to burn half of Israel" he claimed. His statement made the United States and the rest of the world fearful of further imprudent moves. Bush announced his policy regarding Iraq to be a "regime change" in April. Moreover, he wanted Congress to grant him the authorization to employ the war (359).

The Iraqi Joint Act, officially known as "The Authorization for Use of Military Force against Iraq Resolution of 2002," was approved by the US Government in October 2002. The resolution permitted any use of US military forces against the Iraqi regime in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The intention was to first disarmament Iraq so

that terrorists would not be able to utilize it. Second, Saddam Hussein's aid to terrorism must be ended, and eventually, the Iraqi population must be liberated from Saddam Hussein, whom the US considered a dangerous dictator. Many, however, claimed that the invasion of Iraq had been Bush's intention from the start and that his government used the WMD plus 9/11 as an excuse to start the war (The Iraqi Joint Act). In the same way that Bush felt free to launch the war in March 2003, he proclaimed its end in May of that year, illustrating that bringing peace to Iraq was much more difficult than putting the war to an end.

Initially, the war on terror served no purpose other than to ensure domestic security in the United States, which can only be accomplished by tracking down and destroying every terrorist network in the world, even if it means fighting terrorists in their home countries outside the US. As many Political scientists had stated it is self-evident that the United States had to rethink its approach to military intervention, like Jenkins and Godges who discussed the idea and explained, that the early stages of the war on terror had no purpose other than ensuring the internal security of the United States (34). Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States initiated an invasion of Afghanistan, which has since become America's longest war. In addition, it rapidly grew to include the invasion of Iraq, demonstrating that the conflict was framed in political terms. Jenkins and Godges also expressly favour an invasion of Afghanistan to eliminate al Qaeda. Nonetheless, they reject the Iraq war, saying that it served little purpose other than to deflect focus away from Afghanistan and the hunt for al Qaeda.

According to the US department of state archive, Bush's new strategy aimed at eradicating Al Qaeda from existence, this can only be done by disrupting a number of political governments which have permitted terrorists to take shelter on their territory. His Administration's strategy sends a clear message to the rest of the world: any

country that hides or supports terrorists will be viewed as an enemy. President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell have even established a national anti-terrorist alliance. NATO, The Organization of American States (OAS), quickly declared their treaty commitments to assist the US, as well as 136 other nations, which have provided a range of military support. Terrorists, without a doubt, require funding to conduct such horrific acts; so, the President's initial strike in the war against terror had been with his hand, as he simply took steps to prevent terrorist funding and obstruct their future avenues of collecting and moving money (US department of state).

The United States targeted Afghanistan first considering it used to be a safe haven for many terrorists including Al-Qaeda. Because, rather than focusing on capturing Al-Qaeda, Bush's strategy has focused on destroying countries that harbor them (Van Evera 12). The war, however, was not against Afghanistan but against those in power, the Taliban regime that had harbored Al-Qaeda in exchange for millions of dollars. By deposing the Taliban, the US may restrict al-Qaeda's access to huge training facilities and degrade its leader's capacity to communicate with its global network. In fact, it did serve US objectives since it affected al-Qaeda in such a way that its commanders were unable to connect with their members all over the world, particularly at their "training sites" abroad. The sites were intended to train jihadists for such future attacks. As an outcome, there has been a significant reduction in the number of terrorist attacks. Van Evera, on the other hand, claimed that Bush's war in Afghanistan ran far too long and yielded no outcomes, despite the fact that they destroyed the Taliban leadership and defeated al-Qaeda at Tora Bora in Afghanistan in 2001 (13). Indeed, the fight against terrorism lasted longer and continued to drain lives without accomplishing any of the objectives set by the US at the start of the war,

in addition to several missteps, such as allowing al-senior Qaeda's leadership to escape. Thus, most of Bush's policies could be deemed a failure.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, undoubtedly the 9\11 terrorist attacks characterized George W. Bush's presidency, from his intensive counter-terrorism programs in which he responded by improving the US's domestic security, and expanding US military force on a global scale. His newly announced policies on the "war on terror", as well as the launch of "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan and Iraq, focused on the use of armed force, which had negative repercussions. As the US encountered war, it realized its vulnerability and the ferocity of the hostility directed at it. For the rest of the world, the United States appeared to be untouchable. Nonetheless, the 9/11 attacks, as well as how they were handled, led to the demise of that global image.

The majority of Bush's decisions were questionable since the methods used in this war did not bring an end to Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime rather; it resulted in mistakes that shocked Americans as well as the rest of the world. Throughout his administration, the Global War on Terror extended longer without delivering any results. It was neither successful in defeating the Taliban or Al Qaeda, nor in restoring the nation's democratic stability. Bush's presidency came to an end in 2009. His mission, however, was passed down to his successor, Barack Obama, Whose first term saw the resurgence of the Taliban regime and an increase in terrorist attacks.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Obama Administration and the New War on Terror**

#### **1. The New Administration, the New War on Terror**

Under the Bush administration, the United States led a coalition in Afghanistan to eradicate the danger posed by the Taliban and Al Qaeda, which proved to be America's longest conflict in its history. Nonetheless, the US-led intervention ended in failure to eliminate these enemies and restore democratic stability to the country. On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama was elected as the 44th president of the United States, a Democratic Party member. He held positions as an Illinois state senator from 1997 to 2004 and from 2005 to 2008. After delivering his keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention in July 2004, Obama rose fast to prominence in his party. As incoming president, Obama faced numerous obstacles, including an economic meltdown, conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the ongoing threat of terrorism (The White House).

As a candidate, Obama opposed the war in Iraq, saying it was a "choice war." However, he did with the war in Afghanistan, which he essentially referred to as the "real war on terror." Declaring it was a necessary action because Al Qaeda terrorists who assaulted the US were sheltered by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Barack Obama made a passionate campaign promise in 2008 to fundamentally change his conservative predecessor's contentious counterterrorism programs, implementing a morally acceptable, accurate, and successful counter-terrorism campaign. Obama promised to bring the United States to a moral, peaceful, and cooperative foreign policy founded on fundamental values and principles (McCrisken 783). In a speech held in Washington, D.C. on July 15, 2008, Obama proclaimed how the War in Iraq was a failing approach, all it did was distract the mounting terrorist threats from



Afghanistan and demonstrate the need to depart from Iraq. He asserted said if elected as president, he would end the war in Iraq by withdrawing approximately all US forces within 16 months. And therefore would establish a strong, wise, and principled foreign security strategy, containing five goals, one of which is to successfully end the Iraqi battle, to put the campaign against Al Qaeda to an end, keep all nuclear weapons and supplies out of the hands of terrorists and hostile governments, and address the challenges of the twenty-first century, the US must establish true energy security and then rebuild our partnerships (Indurthy 14).

### **1.1. Barack Obama's War on Terror**

Obama claimed that the message to the rest of the globe was clear: the US can fight terrorism but in a way that is compatible with American principles and beliefs, as well as bringing up further ideological changes. He assured the necessity of rewriting the storyline of the 'war on terror' by abandoning the terms used by the Bush administration, he also acknowledged counterterrorism policy as a zone of unpredictability in terms of political risk (McCrisken 781). By the time Obama entered office in January, the Taliban regime had resurged, and increased its terrorist acts, extending activities to places near the capital, Kabul, and, by 2008, it extended to Kabul itself, in which they had formerly not existed. This Taliban's resurgence was caused by several factors, including enormous corruption in most of the administrative machinery, particularly the police and judiciary, which aided the Taliban's capacity to fulfill the government void. In addition, the global community has failed to implement its promise of a better future for Afghans (Sharma 02). In response to the situation, Obama announced in a speech a "comprehensive strategy" for Afghanistan and Pakistan also known as the Af-Pak (Afghanistan-Pakistan) strategy in March 2009, after consulting with the Afghan and Pakistani governments, US partners and NATO

allies, and other international organizations, as well as members of Congress. Obama ordered the deployment of an extra 21,000 US forces, these additional forces were aimed at combating a "revived" Taliban and halting the flow of foreign fighters through the Afghan-Pakistan border in the south. Three themes characterized the first quarter of 2009: namely Taliban's resurgence and expansion throughout Pakistan, Obama's Af-Pak policy, and the dispute over the upcoming Afghan presidential elections (01).

In his March 2009 New Strategy, Obama connected Afghanistan's success to Pakistan's stability. It was proven the establishment of safe havens in Pakistan's tribal areas, has aided in the sustenance of the Afghan insurgency. This policy's central objective was to "demolish, destroy, and eliminate al Qaeda as well as its hideouts in Pakistan, and to also prohibit its restoration to Pakistan or Afghanistan." Rather than fighting a battle of destruction, the US intends to weaken the Taliban by denying it access to crucial resources such as men, finances, and safe havens among friendly people (Armitage et al. 40). The US had to work hard to support a much more capable and responsible Afghan administration for that purpose. Afghan President Karzai praised the policy, claiming that it will bring Afghanistan and the global community closer to success against terrorism.

The role of NATO members in this strategy was to contribute to the development of Afghan civil society, such as by providing resources to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Which are small groups of military and civilian people working in Afghanistan's provinces purpose of providing security for aid workers and assisting with international aid in areas where there is an ongoing conflict. As a result, NATO nations promised to send an additional 5,000 forces to train the Afghan police and military force as well as provide protection for the country's presidential election in August (Indurthy 15).

## **2.1. The US Troop Surge**

By July 2009, the United States Marine Forces had initiated a significant operation in southern Afghanistan in response to the rising Taliban insurgency in the country's southern districts, particularly Helmand, by August, it was predicted that US forces would number between 60,000 and 68,000. Furthermore, President Obama announced a large expansion of the US operation on December 1, 2009. The operation called the Afghan Surge in which the president committed an additional thirty thousand forces to the fight in a nationally televised speech, on top of the sixty-eight thousand already in place. That was shortly after commanding general McChrystal assessed that there were insufficient troops to carry out the new strategy. Moreover, For the first time in the eight-year battle, a timeline for US military involvement has been established, with Obama setting July 2011 as the start of a troop withdrawal (Council on Foreign Relations). This increase in the US troops was followed by a significant increase in US drone operations in Pakistan, which were successful in killing Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud. However, The new strategy also resulted in a rise in US military casualties; specifically, within the first three months of 2010, US fatalities became roughly double what they had been during the same time in 2009 (Brown 2-3).

In early and mid-2010, US Marines launched and successfully attacked the insurgent-held village of Marja in Helmand's southern province. Meanwhile, the Obama government's relationships with President Karzai were tense, Karzai announced that he would try to reconcile with both the Taliban and their leader, Mullah Omar, who has persistently refused. In April 2010, under tremendous US pressure, Karzai responded by threatening to join the Taliban if somehow the international community did not end meddling in Afghan matters. Nevertheless,

Karzai's visit to the US in May 2010 was aimed at mending or, at the very least, publicly attempting to restore their relationship (Armitage et al. 42). Nonetheless, in June 2010, President Obama was met with yet another challenge, when Afghanistan's military command structure dramatically shifted once more, as he removed McChrystal from command, replacing him with Gen. David Petraeus, who was in charge of the surge plan in Iraq. After McChrystal and a few of his staff uttered critical comments against Obama and other high-ranking members of the administration (42).

The year 2011 witnessed advancements in the war's major aims of capturing top al-Qaeda leaders and dealing with the Taliban. Bin Laden was murdered by US troops on May 2, 2011, approximately ten years after escaping from Tora Bora in Afghanistan, and just after intelligence detected him sheltering in a safe house in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Later, on June 22, President proposed an expedited timetable for the departure of US forces from Afghanistan, claiming that the US had mostly accomplished its objectives by blocking al-Qaeda activities and eliminating many of its leaders. This plan aimed for a 30,000-strong reduction in US forces in Afghanistan in a year, with a total withdrawal of troops and equipment by the end of 2014. During the same year, the Middle East witnessed a period of world-shaking developments, with popular political upheavals resulting in the unexpected collapse of long-standing authoritarian governments, as well as major protests and conflicts in other nations in the region. Whereas the Obama administration attempted to cautiously express its support for the protesters' democratic goals without directly interfering with the affairs of other countries, which drove Obama to become a little more involved in the region without his will (White 7-8). According to Tariq Ali in his online lecture Obama's war, the surge was indeed a unique policy that enabled President Barack Obama to distinguish himself from the Bush administration (London Review of Books).

Through the end of Obama's first term and the start of his second term in 2012, many political analysts had analyzed Obama's first-term foreign affairs legacy, which was primarily focused on the Middle East. Four years after most of his platitudes and vows, the curtain has finally lifted, revealing his real objectives. Because, while the US has achieved some of its objectives in Afghanistan, such as killing al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, the length of the Afghan War, as well as the foreign presence in the region, have arguably created new U.S. interests there. It was claimed that these were political and economic goals that not only the United States but also other multiple players were seeking (Goodson 259). The point that led political scientists to admit what the US was doing in the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, underneath the umbrella of its stated aims of the war against terror. Had certain reservations as well as other undisclosed objectives, which were encircled by a lot of ambiguities, but those objectives became apparent by the place and time of those wars. (Dunn 1).

## **2. Real Motives Behind the Afghan War**

Many political analysts such as Elizabeth Wishnick, William Maynes, and Zbigniew Brzezinski sought to understand the nature of American objectives in the Middle East, and Central Asia particularly Afghanistan and Iraq, as part of the American effort to combat terrorism from the Cold War period to the American invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 until today. As well as how the US was using the occurrences of Sept. 11, 2001, to pursue its policies and strategic goals, the most notable of which is a pre-emptive military placement throughout geostrategic locations that comprised the heart of the world. Which are the Middle East and Central Asia, near the borders of its former enemies, Russia which is the economic heir of the collapsed Soviet Union, and possible future enemies primarily China. As a result, The US developed the national strategy based on resorting to pre-emptive fights rather

than having to wait for the opponent to threaten these strategic and critical places for American interests (Cook 2-3).

### **2.1. US Geopolitical Competition with Russia and China**

The International conflicts between major powers are in fact regarded as one of the factors affecting world peace and security; it threatens the stability of other countries. These conflicts are constantly changing and evolving, this is because of the numerous factors that influence the nature of the conflict, as well as the objectives that its sides seek to achieve. The great powers have always been eager to play a notable role in international affairs, and it is through this that they try to accomplish their vital interests and the goals of their greater strategy (Brzezinski 5-6).

The Middle East region is of high significance in the international system on several stages, particularly geopolitical as well as energy levels. Enormously so that it can be recognized as a key to world dominance, but because of its significance, this region has been and continues to be the focus of many great powers, particularly Russia, the United States, and China. In terms of geopolitics, it seems that the Middle East region is of great importance in these states' strategies because gaining a powerful position in this territory would then accomplish the objectives of other strategic goals, not only in the region but also globally. From an energy standpoint, there are numerous motivating factors driving American, Russian, and Chinese moves; access to abundant energy resources in the Middle East region, as well as ensuring the arrival of oil and natural gas supplies across that area. All of these factors combined to make the Middle East a collision zone for the three major powers (Aras and Kardaş 397-398).

Afghanistan is one of those regions that fall upon as target of the world's mightiest powers. Afghanistan is considered a part of The Greater Middle East, a phrase coined by President Bush to shape together all Arab Countries alongside Turkey, the occupied

territories of Palestine, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Afghanistan, in particular, has great geopolitical importance in comparison to other regions, and this importance does not refer to political geography, as is commonly assumed, but rather to how the major powers use this geographical location politically in their competition with one another (Dar 62-63).

Thus, what are the forms of American-Russian-Chinese competition in the Middle East and Central Asia? Why Afghanistan has been put under the microscope of these great powers? How the US was determined to secure its interests in a variety of ways and means? These main questions will be discussed in this section in order to identify significant manifestations of such a competition. Consequently, we have identified the two most vital aspects represented in the geopolitical field and the energy field.

### **2.2.1. The Concept of Geopolitics**

According to Sören Scholvin. The term geopolitics was coined around the turn of the twentieth century by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén, to refer to politics, particularly international relations, as affected by geographical factors. However, this does not preclude the use of geopolitics prior to that. Political geography has been commonly used in history, but its introduction as a science as well as a field of knowledge with detailed rules and methods occurred only in the twentieth century (8). Rudolf Kjellén defined it as “the study of nations as life forms, based on demographic, economic, political, social, as well as geographical factors”. In other sayings, “geopolitics is the study of the geographic factors that influence power dynamics in international relations” (qtd. in Scholvin 8).

Scholvin also stated that many scholars use geopolitical interpretations in their studies of international relations, despite the fact that this type of geopolitical thinking has been heavily criticized. In order to explain state conflicts, Michael Klare, for

instance, concentrates on the demand, supply, as well as geographical features of resources. According to Robert Kaplan, "the outside environment faced by every state when determining its own strategy." should be examined (qtd. in Scholvin 5). Thus according to Halford Mackinder, Afghanistan and Iran have been put under the microscope of the great powers in order to control them, since both are central regions within the heart of the world. It can be stated that Geopolitics has been widely used as a softer synonym for global politics in the contemporary era.

### **2.1.2. The Middle East's Geopolitical Characteristics and its Role in Major-Country Competition**

The Middle East is a geographic location at the point of intersection which includes three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe, and on which regional and global political, economic, and social interests clash. The area is characterized by its breadth and depth, therefore it allows the deployment of military bases during times of war, and it has the ability to adjust even unconventional military strikes. It is also distinguished by its diversity and abundance of energy resources, and minerals, as well as the diversity of its most moderate climate. Alfred Mahan who was a US naval officer and historian, his statement upon which first descriptions of the Middle East region were centered, provided a clear American indication of the vitality of the Middle East's geopolitical position (Koppes 95-96). In US geopolitical terminology, the Middle East refers to the entire region spanning approximately 778.17 million km and including Arab countries, and Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan. In terms of official US political discourse, this region constitutes a clear geopolitical unit, despite the fact that it includes more than two distinct regions (Dar4).

For Russia, the Middle East's lands, plateaus, seas, and waterways have their own significance and contain many aspects that are attractive to Russia's political interests.



The new Russian plan was based on its ambition of the significance of geographic value and a policy for the Middle East region, which also provides a central point platform and a political lever for any future role of any major power (6). The People's Republic of China has always regarded the Middle East as a minor and insignificant region, China's interest in the region has gradually increased in tandem with the United States. Which only seeks stability in the region, as well as to expand and facilitate the implementation of the new Chinese Silk Road project (the Road and the Belt), the success of which will result in the creation of a massive economic renaissance in various parts of the world (Scobell and Alireza 18).

### **2.1.3. The Middle East's Importance in Terms of Energy**

Despite accounting for only 4% of world GDP, the Middle East is vital to the global economy due to its availability of two natural resources: oil and natural gas. In fact, the Middle East controls such a large portion of the world's energy supply so when oil and gas prices start rising in the Middle East, prices around the world start rising as well. Most of this oil the world's total supply transmits through the Strait of Hormuz, which separates Iran from the Gulf region. Such strait has become so strategic that specialists refer to it as the worldwide economy's pivot (CFR World101).

According to Steven Cook, in his report "Major Power Rivalry in the Middle East", Natural resources are among the causes of conflict and competition in the Middle East. The region emerged as a geo-economics potential power source in this competition, in which the United States competed. Russia, China, and other regional powers were also in the process of commanding and controlling the region's strategic location for energy resource expansion in terms of balancing their future energy demands.

Afghanistan alone possesses significant natural resources such as copper, marble, and precious stones. Its reputation, as a resource-rich country is not new. The very first explorations took place in the nineteenth century, by the Soviet forces where a high-quality copper field was found. It was also stated that China wants to dominate unexplored areas, such as lithium as well as other unique materials, and accomplishment in this area will benefit it in its race with the United States and Europe, whilst also Russia is attempting to reestablish its old influence in Afghanistan. It is stated that during the Soviet Union period, Moscow was the first to begin extracting chromium, uranium, emerald stones, and hydrocarbons. During the 1960s, it also received Afghani oil (Arredondas).

## **2.2. US Policies, Methods, and Actions to Sustain Control of the Middle East**

### **2.2.1. During the Cold War**

The Cold War was a duration of geopolitical tension between both the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as their separate allies, and the Middle East has been one of those regions that witnessed the vivid conflict between the two dominant poles in order to achieve polarization and singularity. Considering the significance of this region to both powers, each of them needed to rely on various actions and strategies to guarantee a major influence as well as position in the region, which would help drive the opposing side out, paving the way for its disposal. The US has indeed been actively engaged in various Middle Eastern conflicts. Starting with the Afghan-Soviet war, both the US and the Soviet Union desired hegemony throughout Afghanistan during the Cold War; hence, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 presented a dangerous condition for the US, jeopardizing its geopolitical interests in the Area and South Asia. Controlling this region would permit

not just to terrorize neighboring states, but also to control oil supplies, providing enormous political leverage (Poullada 01).

Following the start of the Soviet-Afghan War, throughout the conflict, the U.S Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) alongside the U.K., Saudi Arabia, and more launched Operation Cyclone, which was an assistance operation for the guerrilla militia, which battled the USSR troops. This same Mujahedin resistance was a guerrilla force that emerged shortly after the Soviet invasion and mounted raids against communist forces around Kabul (Wood 167). It was also noted that in regard to the Soviet Union's intentions in Afghanistan, the US was unsure of them, and yet it saw them as an expansion of authority that would have been disadvantageous to its national security within the Cold War context (171).

The United States and its partners were able to recruit Muslims from all over the world to engage in the Mujahedin force, as the US portrayed the Soviet-Afghan War as a religious battle since the weapon of religion was indeed a tool that controlled public opinion in Arab and Islamic nations. Furthermore, The US presented the Soviets in Afghanistan as communist forces of atheism and infidel. The Islamic perspective on Communism favored the US. The Mujahedeen hurried to defend Afghanistan from communist colonization (Mamdani 770). This US military assistance to the mujahedeen totalled 660 million dollars in 1987 alone, marking it as the CIA's biggest clandestine operation. A political commentator Mahmoud M. further asserted that the United States played a critical role in building the relationship between Islam and terror in Central Asia. The Mujahedeen and al-Qaeda were Cold War-era fundamentalists, trained, armed, and funded by the CIA and its allies in the region (772).

Once the Afghan people, The Mujahedeen, successfully drove the Soviet Union off Afghan land in 1988, the United States became the global hegemony world power, also its policies shifted from military to economic stability. The US withdrew its aid, creating a space for the Taliban. Their rise to power was indeed the result of the US recklessness, which was solely interested in the simple goal to win the Cold War. This indicates how the United States was engaged only to further its strategic interests (Wood 167-168). Atlas argues, “The US has indeed been competing for hegemonic influence in the Arab world since the 1950s. During the Cold War, the US invoked Soviet expansionism to justify expanding its military, economic, and intelligence capacities around the world, notably in the Middle East” (qtd. in Wood 167).

Following the end of the Cold War, the United States declared the preparation of new world order, that would provide an alternative opponent to replace the Soviet pole, ensuring the continuity of its process of control and its individuality over the world, and that alternative enemy has been revealed as international terrorism. On August 7, 1998, the United States was exposed to many attacks on its embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the confrontation reached a pinnacle between the US and Islamic groups, which were defined as terrorist groups, with the entrance of George W Bush in 2000 to the office (Wood 169).

The year 2000 also held a not-so-favorable situation for the US, as relations between the US and Russia started to shift back toward competition, owing to the significant transformation in Russian strategy as a result of the change in Russian leadership since the year 2000. President Putin began to work to strengthen Russia's comprehensive power and aimed to revive its global position and protect its strategic interests in a variety of areas, notably the Middle East. However, the new Russian path was met with a determined American effort to prevent any Russian entry into a region

regarded as among America's most important regions of influence in the world, resulting in, the rivalry between the two forces on the geopolitical and energy sides of the region has resurfaced.

### **2.2.2. During the Events of September 11, 2001, and beyond**

The 9-11 attack sparked new competition over the Middle East and Central Asia between three global powers: the United States, Russia, and China, each with its own set of goals and interests, whether geopolitical, strategic, or economic. Without a doubt, the Central Asian and Middle Eastern territory is strategically and geopolitically important, which has raised regional and international competition for the region's resources that have played and continue to play a role in formulating the axes of conflict between these powers (Cook 1-2).

Brzezinski, a Polish-American diplomat, and political scientist claimed that the region is indeed the geopolitical variable that holds the key to global hegemony. The major powers attempt to penetrate the Middle Eastern and Central Asian territories took various forms, styles, and strategies, reflecting their intertwined objectives (Brzezinski 40). First, there was Russia, which discovered vital locations in the region, in addition to the United States, this one saw the events of September 11 as justification for approaching the region and competing with Russia, and finally, China, which did not hide its interest in the region, which was a Transportation Bridge to communicate with the rest of the world. Thus far, competition among these players has not resulted in direct confrontation, but rather in the establishment, extension, and reinforcement of influence and reputation at the expense of one another (Cook 4-8).

Despite its enormous military and economic great influence, particularly after the Cold War's end, as the only pole of world affairs. However, on September 11, 2001, that global image of the United States authority and power was destroyed. Since then,

the US has highlighted promoting democracy in the Middle East as a primary foreign policy goal. As a result, the United States has interfered in multiple regions and wars, as well as the War on Terror, has been declared, with the stated goal of attaining a democratic revolution in the Middle East (Wood 167). Without going into detail about the world's reactions to the events of September 11, it can be stated that the United States gained the support of the major competing countries in its fight against terror, particularly Russia and China, in which they used the war on terror as an opportunity to eradicate the revolt of armed minorities within their borders. As a consequence of the events of September 11, 2001, the two parties formed a new alliance and partnership relation, as well as the establishment of a new environment in the nature of international affairs.

Glaser claimed that Upon the Soviet withdrawal, the US found Afghanistan as an essential geographic area for its objectives in a crucial strategic region of Central Asia. Thus, the occurrences of September 11th and the war on terror provided a perfect chance to attain a dual objective, on the one hand, control of Afghanistan, and on the other hand, expanding its influence over the Middle East and Central Asia, in order to avert any regional war in there, which might disrupt the regional power balance (Wood 171). According to Malley and Finer, in their article "The Long Shadow of 9/11: How Counterterrorism Warps U.S. Foreign Policy ", there was proof that the US was aware of the attack, implying that 9/11 was allowed to occur because then interventions in the Middle East could be compromised and justified (Malley and Finer).

In the Aftermath of 9\11, the United States foreign policy was focused on the "war on terror." It had to take into account new strategies. However, The Bush administration's undertaken policies at the time were more likely to focus on military

force, negatively affected the global image, and contributed to the rise of anti-Americanism. Especially after the declaration of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the use of power. Consequently, The US had to work hard to regain its global standing and reconsider its tools since the military intervention demonstrated largely its ineffectiveness to achieve American goals in the region (Totoonchie 03).

### **2.2.3. Soft Power and State-Building Policy in Use**

According to Former US Secretary Of Defense Gates, “the use of military intervention is required to fight terrorism, although, in the long term, a specific approach is also required, that alternative approach what became known as Soft power” (qtd. in Saleh 48). The concept of “soft power” was popularised by Nye in his 1990 book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, it supported the use of persuading rather than force. In addition, attracting rather than obliging (Bellazi 6). Although the term was not introduced until the 1990s, it was in use prior to that, specifically, during the Cold War, when an ideological conflict existed between The US and the USSR. The US eventually discovered a way to expand its ideology by influence and attraction; it attempted to impose its will on others. Employing the policy now known as "soft power." It succeeded in gaining global leadership, which led it to achieve its goals. (Rosenau 1137). However, after September 11, 2001, attacks and during George W. Bush's first term, the majority of his strategies were characterized by pursuing a foreign policy that aims to prolong a pre-emptive war based on force and threat, as a result of which America's image has been harmed. Thus, that failure led to a shift toward soft power. One of the policies used as a "soft power" tool was international cooperation, which is a US cooperative agreement with several partners, In order to provide humanitarian aid and reconstruction assistance to the war-torn nations (Saleh 94).

In the nation-building efforts context, the US began constructing schools and health centers in an effort to strengthen the capacity of the state during the war. Essentially, a significant portion of the aid provided to the region was devoted to education, because then the US would guarantee the ability to spread American culture and ideologies and to reduce Anti-Americanism. However, the increasing number of civilian deaths, dubbed "collateral damage," hampered whatever probability of gaining civilian hearts and minds (Smoot 45-48).

The protection of women's rights was yet another tool used by the US, as women in Afghanistan were denied human rights including education and employment at the time, thus, the US started assisting girls in attending school and liberating women under Taliban rule. Undoubtedly, defending women's human rights in a war-torn society appears to be a good deed. However, it was an ironic instrument since the military intervention and enhanced violent conflict are much more capable of harming than helping Afghan women because they destabilize the state (Connah 7).

It was claimed that the issue of democracy is yet another crucial soft power tool used by successive US governments in dealing with or besieging the Middle East. Since the events of 9/11, the concept of democratic absence has come to dominate the Arab political landscape. This term denotes that Islamic countries are unable to implement democracy, primarily Afghanistan which is one of the primary causes of violent groups, whether in the Islamic world or elsewhere (Nye 12). In this regard, the US attempted to persuade the population of the importance of establishing a good governance system in the region and the need for Afghans to work cooperatively with them (Gil 6). Matter of fact, the method of promoting democracy, as measured by the mentioned previously American vision, has resulted in numerous failures, particularly



in the Arab region. Moreover, perhaps the Arab Spring wave that some Arab countries experienced is the best proof of this (Wood 6).

The United States has promoted both democracies and dictatorships within the Middle East, particularly the Arab world, based on what is more advantageous to its strategic objectives, without regard for the consequences for other countries. It was claimed that the Obama administration repeatedly spoke in favor of democracy in the Arab world but did little to implement it. As a result, when popular uprisings erupted unexpectedly in more than one Arab country, Obama's administration was completely taken aback (Dekhakhena 6). The uprisings were in response to President Bush's failed interventionist foreign policy, this one resulted in an economic, social, and cultural decline in many Middle Eastern countries, which later increased civic awareness and paved the way for a series of uprisings known as the Arab Spring, which ended the country's half-century of authoritarian rule (7). While Arab countries witnessed this huge revolutionary change, the US role in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area was also changing, and the political relations between both the US and the newer democracies appeared likely to be weaker than it was under a dictatorship.

Soft power is a strategy that some nations actively sought to employ to achieve their objectives, and the United States is at the forefront of these countries. That is, the policy shift witnessed in Afghanistan does not signal the end of American influence in the area, as many studies claim. Rather, it is a new phase of hegemony handled with innovative tools and methods appropriate to the reality of the region and in response to slogans calling for democracy, freedom, and human rights, which are the stated goals that the US is utilizing to achieve its foreign policy objectives. However, given the size of its economic, political, moral, and influence, the US soft power on which it relied has not been welcomed by many peoples and powers. Despite

the fact that the US managed to impose "soft power" in Afghanistan and attempted to rebuild the country, it did more harm than good.

### **Conclusion**

The United States has a long history of interventions and wars, especially in the Middle East and Central Asia. Those wars were under different pretexts and justifications, where they were justified in the language of democracy, freedom, and human rights principles. As the world's major economic, political, and military power, the US has always been concerned with building a positive image all around the world, in order to successfully assume its international role by exporting its political model, way of life, and ideology. However, that image was distorted by President Bush's policies post-September 11. When President Obama took office, he faced numerous challenges, including a tarnished image of the United States and continuous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. During his rule, and because of the war's inefficiency, many analysts began to admit that the war was carried out for other, unrevealed objectives.

This chapter outlined the objectives from a Geopolitical and Energy perspective. As previously stated, not only the US seeks to achieve these goals, but also so do other rivals with the goal of reshaping and controlling the world. Since the Middle East and Central Asia are both increasingly vital with their natural resources and minerals, the region was and continues to be the focus of many world powers. Therefore, it was investigated how the US used methods, methods, and tools to secure its interests and maintain dominance in the region, particularly in Afghanistan. Finally, it is possible to conclude that US policies were somewhat unsuccessful, and the best illustration is the popular uprisings, also known as the Arab Spring.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Assessment of the United States War in Afghanistan**

#### **Introduction**

The preceding chapters discussed Bush and Obama's war on terror including their strategies and policies in Afghanistan, as well as how each of them dealt with the changing mission in Afghanistan since 2001. One, which contributed to tens of thousands of American and Afghan fatalities, fruitless attempts to strengthen the country's political leadership, as well as a Taliban that refused to be defeated. The second chapter sheds light on the real motives for the invasion of Afghanistan. Then, the objective of this chapter is to assess the US war in Afghanistan as a whole basing on its withdrawal.

The US decision to leave Afghanistan was necessary, it had actually no choice but to do so because the truth is that America has lost in Afghanistan. In fact, the US failed to reach any of its regional objectives, despite having many ambitions regarding Afghanistan, as well as the region as a whole. The war on terror was merely a cover for other objectives because Al-Qaeda had long since left Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden was killed a long time ago, but America remained involved in the region (Hekmatyar 3).

The Bush administration's response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks was the war in Afghanistan. To justify such invasion, primarily two goals were declared: to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven or sanctuary for Al-Qaeda and to deny it a safe base of operations in Afghanistan by deposing the Taliban government. Many, however, argued that Bush's objectives were mishandled in terms of the policies implemented at the time. Like Donald Stoker, who claims that when his administration declared a "Global War on Terror," President Bush showed clear indications of not

understanding the nature of the war he was launching (Stoker 17). According to James Lebovic a professor of political science and International Affairs, the United States planning for the war was limited. It had prioritized the immediate goal of ousting the Taliban and apprehending Al Qaeda over long-term objectives (Lebovic 122).

The US policies to achieve those objectives and the implementation strategies have also been deficient and faulty, to the point that the Bush administration policymakers struggled to find new policies to restore the United States image as well as the world's sympathy and support, particularly during President Bush's first term when his administration was more focused on military tactics. However, it subsequently became more involved in softer means, such as implementing aid assistance and rebuilding Afghanistan (Azizian 19). Bush left office in 2009 transferring the mission to his successor. Over 30,000 US troops were positioned in Afghanistan, the Taliban was trying to stage a complete insurgency, and his strategies had proven to be a complete failure. President Barack Obama faced a decision on a war he inherited from George W. Bush when he took office in 2009.

Obama's strategy revolved around the deployment of more troops to Afghanistan. At the same time, he decided to commit to a withdrawal timeframe, which he set in 2011. Over the next few years, troop levels steadily decreased as the US engaged in controversial diplomacy with Afghanistan rulers. Obama had realized that efforts to develop a Democratic country were more or less meaningless and that eliminating terrorists as well as keeping the Taliban in check amounted to the boundaries of the US role. However, his strategies have been highly criticized as well. Nearly 20 years later, The American objective in Afghanistan has come to end in a tragic and chaotic way. On August 30, 2021, the United States campaign in Afghanistan ended, marking

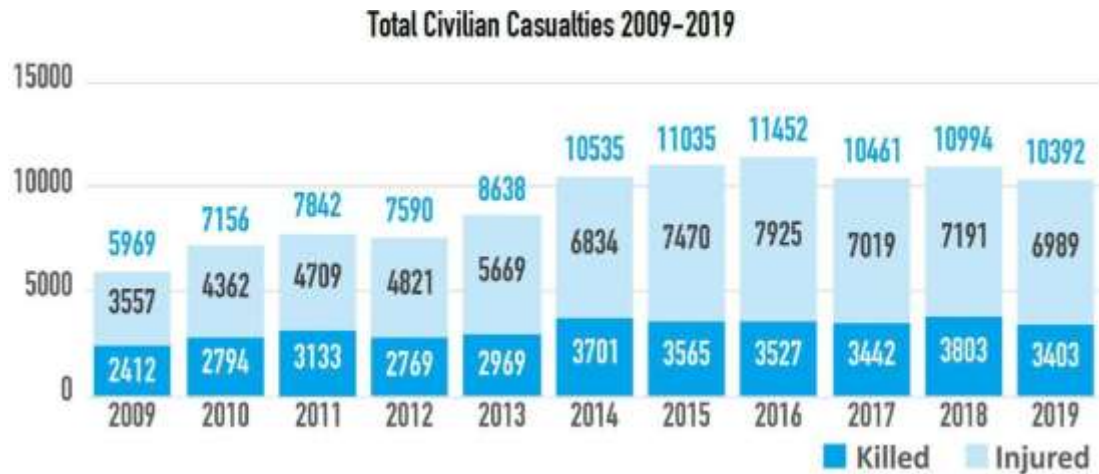
the end of America's longest war in its history and handing over Afghanistan to the Taliban once more.

## **1. Causes of the US Withdraw**

### **1.1. Casualties Toll**

During Trump's presidency, military operations between US government troops as well as the Taliban increased, resulting in over 8,000 civilian deaths. Countless numbers of Taliban attacks on the Afghan government and US military installations killed and injured civilians. Later, and prior to the September 28 presidential elections, Taliban suicide attacks and the use of an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) on political gatherings killed and injured hundreds of civilians. Moreover, the attacks did not stop there. The Taliban specifically targeted civilians working for the Afghan government or foreign forces, as well as healthcare providers and centers. As well as abuse and violence against women, among other things.

In a report, The UN has revealed the true scope of the humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan over the last decade. According to this new United Nations and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) data released in February 2020, over 3,400 civilians were killed and 6,989 people were injured, making this the sixth year in a row that civilian casualties have surpassed 10,000. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan emphasized the importance of protecting civilian lives as peace efforts progressed "It is extremely important that all sides seize this opportunity to end the fighting since peace has been long overdue" (qtd. in United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan).



**Fig. 1.** Total Civilian Casualties 2009 until 2019

**Source:** United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. *Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2019*. United Nations, Jan. 2020.

Following that, the joint research project between Brown and Boston Universities of America, "The Cost of War," revealed that approximately 641,000 Afghan army and police forces had been killed in war since 2001. While the UNAMA revealed that approximately 111,000 civilians were killed since the mission began officially recording figures in 2009, indicating that the human losses are much higher. It is also worth noting that nearly 2,400 US soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan since 2001, with over 20,000 others injured. Trump has repeatedly stated that the war is extremely costly in terms of both lives and money. President Trump was reportedly unsatisfied with the lack of military progress; he multiple times voiced displeasure with the US war mission in Afghanistan and expressed a willingness to retreat US troops as soon as possible. As a result, for the first time, President Donald Trump announced formal and direct US-Taliban negotiations alone without the involvement of the Afghan government.

## **1.2. The Doha Agreement**

In February 2020, President Trump and the Taliban agreed to sign the Joint Statement for ending the conflict in Afghanistan, recognized as the Doha Agreement. According to the agreement, the pullout of US troops from Afghanistan is contingent on the Taliban's assurances that the Afghan region will not be used as a starting point for future attacks on American soil. However, the agreement did not include the then-Afghan administration. Most of the major terms of the agreement include the following: initially, the US will commit to withdrawing all armed units of the US, NATO troops, and Coalition members from Afghanistan within 135 days of signing the deal, followed by a complete withdrawal of all US and allied forces by May 2021. In exchange, the Taliban agreed to stop any groups, including Al Qaeda, from posing a threat to the US or its allies by not allowing them to settle, prepare, or raise funds in Afghanistan (Jones 1).

The agreement also stipulated the start of intra-Afghan peace efforts in order to a ceasefire, as well as prisoner releases, where the Afghan Government would free 5,000 Taliban prisoners and the Taliban release 1,000. It was also agreed that the US and its allies would cease threatening to use force against Afghanistan's territorial sovereignty or political independence or even getting involved in its domestic matters. (US Institute of Peace). Following US confirmation for their withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban reportedly released a religious declaration in early March 2020 highlighting their actual intent to establish an Islamic government in Afghanistan headed by the Taliban emir, Mullah Haibatullah. The declaration decreed that the violence would remain until the emir assumed control of Afghanistan.

The agreement had significant flaws, such as the failure to include the Afghan government in the negotiations. Besides that, it was unknown whether the Taliban was

serious about reaching a deal or if its leaders were also simply making deals to have American troops withdraw so that they could overthrow the Afghan government (Jones 2). The Doha Agreement was critical for the United States because a withdrawal from Afghanistan without a peace treaty would dramatically increase violence in Afghanistan, enable extremist groups to resurge, and raise serious doubts about the US's power, credibility, and influence (15).

### **1.3. Intra-Afghan Peace Talks**

At the same time, the agreement called for peace negotiations between the Afghan parties, which included the Taliban and the Afghan government at the time, in order to reach a power-sharing agreement. The negotiation between the Taliban and the Afghan government also called for a prisoner exchange. The Taliban stated that they were prepared for intra-Afghan negotiations, and thought that there will be no discussions unless approximately 5,000 of their prisoners were set to release. However, there was political gridlock in Kabul, as two immediate obstacles prevented talks from starting in, as stipulated in the agreement. The first was an ongoing conflict over the September 2019 presidential election. The second impediment was a disagreement over the release of prisoners. In order to foster mutual trust, Kabul had to release 5,000 captured Taliban members while the Taliban had to release 1,000 captured Afghan soldiers (Ayotte et al. 20).

Therefore, Due to the negotiation's slow progress, the US had to intervene between the two parties in order for them to reach an agreement. The first hurdle was overcome when the US threatened to cut government funding unless the electoral dispute was resolved. However, the issue of prisoner exchange was troubled by the Taliban's insistence on deciding which prisoners must be released, such as a number of captives responsible for horrible crimes and attacks. Eventually, the Afghan government



agreed to finalize these releases, when the US implemented massive pressure, including the threat of canceling financial support (20).

Dispute between the two sides was also evident when Afghan officials accused the Taliban of the April 2020 explosion in Helmand, which killed several children. As a result, the conflict over prisoner release did not end until early September 2020, when the Afghan government released approximately 5,000 Taliban prisoners, removing the primary impediment to intra-Afghan talks (Clayton et al. 10-11). However, According to John Kirby a pentagon Press Secretary, the Taliban's ultimate objective was to rule all of Afghanistan through military conflict instead of reaching a political settlement. Despite long-standing attempts to reach a peaceful solution. These negotiations were characterized as erratic and frequently stalled on a number of issues, including the Taliban's refusal to agree to a cease-fire and the Republic's refusal to accept the Taliban's interpretation of Sharia law.

## **2. The United States Military Withdrawal**

By January 15, 2021, further troop withdrawals occurred during Trump's final days in office, leaving 2,500 troops in Afghanistan. On behalf of President Trump, Robert C. O'Brien, US National Security Advisor, stated that the incoming Biden government would continue the commitment, and have all US forces back safely and in their entirety by the previously planned 1 May 2021 dateline (Clayton et al. 7). President Biden entered office as the 46th President of the United States on January 20, 2021. In 2009, he served as Obama's vice president. Back then, it was claimed that he disapproved of the Obama presidency's decision to increase US troop levels. Biden stated unequivocally that he opposes the inherited diplomatic agreement, as well as the commitment to withdraw all US forces from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021. However, because it was a United States government agreement, he had to follow

through on it. Biden stated during a press conference on March 25, 2021, "I can't picture" US troops staying in Afghanistan the next year (qtd. in Clayton et al. 7).

Biden also confirmed that the withdrawal would not be rushed. Nevertheless, it will be done in a responsible, deliberate, and safe manner, in collaboration with the US allies and partners, who have more forces in Afghanistan than the US. On April 14, 2021, he declared that the "final withdrawal" would begin on May 1, 2021, and would last until September 11, 2021. The Taliban undoubtedly disagreed with President Biden's decision to postpone the exit, accusing the US of violating the February 2020 agreement and claiming that this decision would result in reactions that the US would not like, so the US must bear responsibility for all future consequences. The final withdrawal began on May 1, 2021, as planned, and by June, the US Central Command confirmed that up to 44 percent of the pullout had been completed (U.S. Central Command).

Later on July 08, President Obama announced that the US military mission in Afghanistan would conclude on August 31st rather than September 11, 2021. However, the withdrawal was not as smooth and safe as Biden had hoped, because the same month saw the Taliban's progress, culminating in August when they took control of Kabul, prompting emergency evacuations and an increase in the number of US forces deployed to facilitate the evacuation. The American withdrawal was brought to an end after a two-week-long air evacuation from Kabul Airport. American forces successfully evacuated thousands of American as well as Afghan citizens even through the chaos that existed. Thus, the final US plane as part of the emergency evacuation took off from Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport on August 31 (Clayton et al. 8).

Merely days after the United States announced its pullout from Afghanistan; the Taliban gradually took control of the country's provinces, eventually reaching Kabul. Such rapid developments raised several questions about the reasons for the end of the war with significant gains for the Taliban, as well as the failure of the states to build a united nation.

### **3. The Afghan War in Political Perspectives**

At the end of the war, supporters and opponents held opposing views. Some observers speculated that the Biden administration could have chosen to ignore the agreement and maintain a small force of several thousand troops in the country in order to facilitate the intra-Afghan peace agreement. President Biden, on the other hand, argued that the small number of US troops would not have been enough to prevent the Taliban and that a new escalation of US forces in Afghanistan would eventually be required. Moreover, it would have put additional US resources and lives at risk (qtd. In Clayton et al.). The US, after all these years of war, eventually realized that the Taliban organization is a part of Afghan society and that it cannot be eliminated militarily.

#### **3.1. The Afghan War was America's Biggest Mistake**

Twenty years have passed since the 9/11 attacks, which were followed by a significant US military presence in the Middle East, including operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The United States harmed its image in the world by leading interventions in the Middle East, particularly in Afghanistan, even after popularizing the slogan "democracy and human rights," but the anti-American sentiments persisted in various parts of the world. US President Donald Trump has even described his predecessor's decision to send troops to the Middle East as the biggest mistake in the

country's history. All of this occurred due to several factors, it was claimed the first as an imbalance in the ends, ways, and means, and the second as a lack of commitment to a long-term strategy (Azizian 2).

Because of the questionable methods used during the military intervention, the War on Terror has certainly had a negative impact on the moral reputation of the West. The United States, in specific, had also paid a heavy price for attempting to "permanently incapacitate Bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders, as well as their Taliban enablers." Undoubtedly, the American public has gotten increasingly fully cognizant of some of the crimes perpetrated in Afghanistan and has gotten extremely opposed to the use of military power in the future (Connah 13).

### **3.2. The War was Carried Out for Economic Rather than Religious Purposes**

In the aftermath of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, as doubts and questions about the American withdrawal from Afghanistan grew, analysts started to assess the Afghan war. It was claimed, that the American war in Afghanistan serves economic purposes rather than religious ones such as eliminating terrorism and establishing a democratic system in the country. Thus, many political analysts believe that, while Afghanistan is among the world's poorest nations, It has natural as well as mineral wealth that might drive it into the top positions of major economies, despite almost 90 percent of its population living on less than two dollars per day and relying primarily on foreign assistance. However, the major reason for not benefiting from those capabilities and riches was the country's decades-long wars and the chaos caused by that uncertainty (Arredondas).

The US policy in Afghanistan has been consistent with its overall strategy towards the oil-producing countries, particularly those in the Middle East. Access to energy

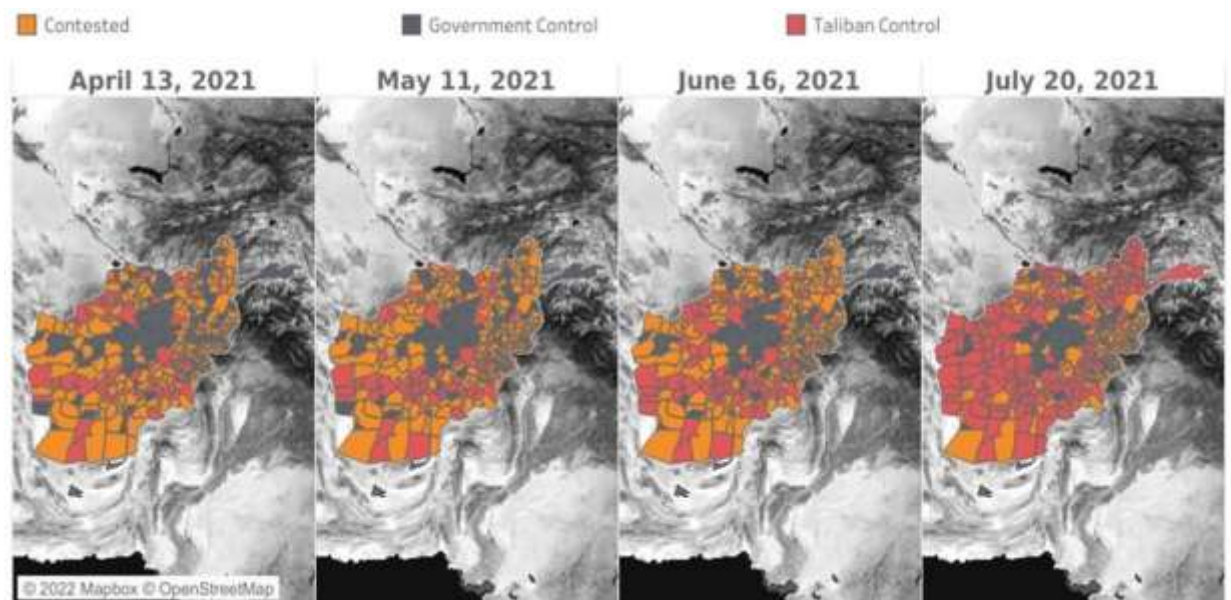
sources is a major concern for the United States, which recognizes that global oil reserves are rapidly depleting. Thus, the upcoming reduction of the world's oil has motivated the West to place its trust in the region. In the same context, the strategic and economic importance of Afghanistan's mineral wealth such as bauxite, copper, iron, and lithium was what made it the world's destination in light of the general trend away from fossil fuels such as oil and gas (Thomas 1216). Another beneficial outcome of the Afghan war or the US military presence in Afghanistan is the ability of the US to positively place its multinational companies within the contemporary great game of controlling the region's vital resources, as well as to achieve the encirclement of the world's major energy resources. Turkmenistan for instance, which shares a border with Afghanistan to the northwest, has the world's third-largest gas reserves and an approximate six billion barrels of oil reserves. According to experts, there is enough energy to fulfill America's needs for the next thirty years (1217).

Thus, the desire for economic and strategic gains was a critical contributor to the US policy in Afghanistan. The US oil companies have devised a plan to gain access to the Central Asian Republics' massive oil and gas reserves, which are worth an estimated \$4 trillion at today's prices. America's desire does not lie in restoring the nation's democratic stability, neither in defeating the Taliban nor Al Qaeda. The clearest illustration we could rely on is the current situation in Afghanistan: the country is not organized, the democratic system has failed, and importantly terrorism is still alive more than before.

### **3.2.1. The Taliban Control and the Chaos**

The Doha agreement signed by Trump and then Biden's decision to remove all US forces by September 2021 was one of the factors leading to the fall of the Afghan

government. Because, as a result of the agreement, the US drastically reduced troop and air attacks, depriving the ANSF of a critical advantage in fighting the Taliban insurgency, resulting in the Taliban taking over Kabul on August 15, 2021 (Clayton et al. 12). The Taliban launched a sweeping expansion in early May 2021, capturing vast sections of the country's rural areas and solidifying its control on some areas where it already had a strong foothold, they seized many more provinces in June. More than 150 Afghan troops were confirmed killed or injured, with conflict taking place in 26 of the country's 34 provinces. The Taliban had taken control of Shir Khan Bandar, the main border crossing with Tajikistan, by the 22nd of June. On July 21, 2021, the Taliban controlled over 200 districts; however, the Taliban had not yet seized any provincial capitals where Afghan troops were centralized, according to General Milley. In fact, one Taliban commander stated that his forces deliberately avoided capturing capital cities before US forces withdrew (14).



**Fig. 2.** Taliban Control Progress from April to July 2021.

**Source:** Bill, Roggio. *Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan*. FDD's Long War Journal.

The Taliban began seizing their first provincial capital in August, an achievement so significant that US leaders frequently cited the Taliban's inability to seize a provincial capital as evidence of the Afghan government's relative strength. The Taliban began entering Kabul on August 15, 2021, accomplishing their effective takeover of the region; some provincial capitals as well as other areas were taken with little fighting (Schroden 46).

Since seizing control over the country, the Taliban has placed rights-violating laws that have significantly hampered women's and girls' health and education, as well as limited freedom of movement, expression, and association, leading to a significant crisis for the country. Previous donors, particularly the United States, eventually reduced aid and funding, depriving a large portion of the population of food, water, shelter, and health care. According to an article by the International Rescue Committee, the ongoing collapse of the economy could further deepen the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The article also predicted that by mid-2022, Afghanistan would have near-universal poverty. This economic crisis, if not resolved, will increase humanitarian needs ranging from food insecurity and malnutrition to health crises (International Rescue Committee).

### **3.2.2. Terrorism is Alive**

Following the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan and the return of Taliban rule, the United States is now dealing with a resurgent terrorist threat. As the Taliban gained power, the Islamic State Khorasan, or IS-K, sought to expand its operations. The group is the most violent of Afghanistan's jihadist insurgencies. Thus, despite the end of the nationwide conflict in 2021, IS-K could boost violence as well as civilian harm. IS-K recruits Afghan and Pakistani jihadists, particularly defecting Afghan Taliban members. Additionally, according to researchers, IS-K has strong ties

to the Haqqani network, which is linked to the Taliban. Undoubtedly, the IS-K poses a significant potential threat and may seek to exploit the country's power shift and countless crises to fuel further insecurity. Shortly after the Taliban took over control, IS-K increased its attacks. It is unclear how effectively the Talia government will approach such security threats and protect Afghan civilians. (International Rescue Committee).

Thus, both the US's stated goals of preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven or sanctuary for al-Qaeda or any other terrorist network and of establishing a democratic region can be said to have failed. The Taliban's victory in Afghanistan demonstrates how unreliable American foreign policy is (Ahmed, "Why Does the US Lose All Its Wars?"). There is still debate about whether the United States did too little or too much, and whether the US could have won the Afghan war with a different strategy. Yet, after two decades of squandering, more than \$2 trillion, and the lives of nearly 2,500 military members, the outcome remains the same, in which Afghanistan is again dominated and managed by the same Taliban movement which governed the region in 2001, demonstrating that the war ended primarily where it began (Barno and Bensahel).

#### **4. The Strategic Benefits of the War on Afghanistan**

As previously stated in the second chapter, following the 9-11 attacks, the American retaliation was formed in a strategic manner. Huasheng, a professor at the Institute of International Studies claimed that Afghanistan's position or location proved to be strategically very important for the United States in this twenty-first century "Global War." It has become clear that the US administration's goal far surpasses justifiable objectives such as the capture of Bin Laden, the elimination of the



Taliban, or even the war on terror as Afghanistan is also a strategic benefit for the US, these American benefits are possible to extrapolate into:

- Preventing China's expansion by encircling and weakening it through direct American presence in Central Asia. In addition, containing Russia, the heir of the Soviet Union, by standing at the gates of Moscow militarily.
- Nearing the axis of evil countries like Iran, which is an important regional power, and an American primary objective that deserves to also be positioned under the close oversight of the American bases (87-88).
- The US would also be able to prevent and counter any rapprochement or the formation of new strategic alliances between Russia, China, Pakistan, and Iran (Rakhimov 145).
- Deploying US forces to ensure a direct military presence in this politically, strategically, and economically critical area near its opponents (146).
- Delivering a message to Russia and China that the US is the world's only imperial power without a rival, and that it will act seriously in implementing its goals in the Middle East and Central Asian regions, where energy sources are located (Wood 174).

## **5. The Benefits of Withdrawing**

After the United States withdrew its troops, effectively ending a 20-year conflict. It was argued that the US withdrawal from Afghanistan was also advantageous and that it had unrevealed objectives. Jones who is a political scientist argued that when the US withdrew its forces from Afghanistan and reduced aid, which was estimated to be worth \$800 billion between 2001 and 2009; it would be able to focus more on its competition with China and Russia (2). Recently, China and Russia have had the best relationship. Although the two countries do not have a formal agreement or

alliance, their common ground is their opposition to moral foreign intervention as well as US hegemony (Blank 2). As a result, the US considers China's proximity to Russia to be a critical concern. Aside from the specific concern about the proximity of China and Russia, there is the notion that China is a major world power, as China's influence on the international scene has gotten stronger in recent years. It is now referred to as being one of the major global economic powers (Huang et al. 4).

Another major source of concern for the United States is Russia and China's growing influence in other critical regions. For Russia, according to Marples, Putin's objective is to re-establish Russia's former empire's regions, by reshaping Europe's borders and occupying major areas which previously were part of the Russian sphere. The critical areas for Russia are concentrated in what is known as the Black Sea region (4). Thus, Russia's current intervention in Ukraine is motivated by a convergence of these interests in order to extend Russia's sphere of influence over surrounding states (Carter 7). According to Masters, having allowed Ukraine to fall into the hands of the West jeopardizes Russia's status as a global superpower. Some scientists also see Russia's unjustified invasion of Ukraine in 2022 as part of a revived geopolitical rivalry between world powers (Council on Foreign Relations).

China's rise is now a reality. Its economy and military power are constantly expanding, and it is now able to compete with the United States in all areas. Consequently, the world has evolved to the point where the US is no longer the sole major power, but rather a multipolarity of several major powers (Modebadze 167). Prior to that, China never seemed to have any expansionist objectives. However, as the country's military and economic power increased in the twenty-first century, so did its desire (168). In order to preserve their hegemonic desires and geopolitical ambitions, these major powers compete with one another. Many political scientists

believe that the conflict among great powers over hegemony and dominance is unavoidable, as per professor Mearsheimer, an American political scientist, these powers have two primary goals. One of which is to influence the region in which they are situated as well as nearby, with the objective of becoming the regional hegemony. Second of which is to block other powers from rising and becoming peer rivals (169).

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, since the end of the Cold War and the events of September 11, 2001, America's objectives have been solely focused on the Middle East and Central Asian countries. The preventive and pre-emptive wars that the US leads in the arenas of these countries, under the guise of fighting terrorism or what is recognized as the global war on terror, are due to the riches of these nations as well as their active components, particularly those countries with hidden riches such as oil and gas, or those that constitute an important strategic area. Thus, the United States saw Afghanistan as an important geographical location for its interests in that vital strategic area. Thus, it had to secure those interests from its Rivals Russia and China.

## **Conclusion**

For nearly two decades, the United States post-9/11 policies have sowed strong doubts abroad about the US role as a peace and democracy promoter. Those policies were not as successful as expected, as they resulted in dreadful outcomes such as the deaths of a large number of people and the destabilization of many countries around the world, as well as fueling anti-Americanism globally, particularly in the Middle East.

Without a doubt, America lost the war in Afghanistan. All of the lives and money expended were largely fruitless in the end. The notion that US efforts were in vain is an abhorrent one for the US. The Bush Administration's global combat strategy in the Middle East failed utterly, passing to his successors the ongoing foreign policy disaster.

During the Obama administration, several efforts were made to repair that damaged image. He pledged to significantly change his conservative predecessor's contentious counter-terrorism programs, trying to implement a morally acceptable, accurate, and successful campaign. His administration's policies were somewhat successful in the sense that they were able to apprehend some Al- Qaeda leaders, most notably Osama bin Laden, the mastermind behind the domestic attacks. However, the continuation of the war opened a new page of questions and doubts about America's true motives in the region.

The American involvement in the Middle East and Central Asia region demonstrates how important it is for its interest. Those interests proved to be related to geopolitical and economic aspects. The first primary objective arises from America's geopolitical competition with rival countries, primarily Russia and China, both of which are viewed as threats to US influence and power. Because, following

the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States became the sole hegemonic player on the international level. As a result, it ensured the continuation of the unipolar status. Oil and natural resources from the Middle East and Central Asia are other crucial facets of the rivalry between world powers. Because global oil reserves are rapidly reducing, access to new energy sources is a major interest for those players.

Because the United States military strategy failed to achieve such goals, new alternative methods were required. The US used "soft power" and "nation-building" policies. The US started to provide humanitarian aid and reconstruction assistance to the war-torn nations, the protection of women's rights, and the establishment of a democratic system. Nonetheless, given the magnitude of its economic, political, moral, and political influence, the US soft power on which it relied has not been welcomed by many peoples. Despite imposing "soft power" in Afghanistan and attempting to rebuild the country, the US did more harm than good.

America's longest war in its history ended 20 years later with the US's complete withdrawal from Afghanistan and with the Taliban seizing control again. Many conclusions are drawn from this research, the first of which is the causes of the US withdrawal, which are related to the humanitarian tragedy in Afghanistan, wherein more than 111,000 civilians have been killed. As a result of the huge number of casualties, the US called for a peace agreement that stipulated that a pullout of US troops from Afghanistan is contingent on the Taliban's assurances that the Afghan region will not be used as a starting point for future attacks on American soil. Despite long-standing efforts to reach a peaceful settlement. The agreement was described as erratic and frequently stalled on a variety of issues, particularly between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

The research also demonstrates how the Afghan war was fought for strategic and economic rather than religious reasons, using the current situation in Afghanistan as substantiation that the Taliban has retaken control and terrorism is still alive. The research finally provides a future vision of how the US would benefit from its withdrawal from Afghanistan. The withdrawal from Afghanistan is expected to save billions of dollars and time, as well as a shift toward restructuring the American economy and focusing on confronting China and Russia, which will dominate the world.

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