

The US-led “War on Terror” in Afghanistan: 2001-2021

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Abstract

During Cold War era, the US supported the armed groups in Afghanistan in terms of training and ammunition against the Soviet Union by fuelling Islamic jihadism. After failed invasion of Soviet Union, the US withdrew completely leaving the armed groups from the region and it created a threat to the whole world. The US became one of the biggest targets and victims of its own policy with 9/11 attacks, Afghanistan was one of the countries the US occupied in order to fight against terrorist organizations and to bring democracy to countries that feed and support terrorism within the framework of the Bush Doctrine. The US did not carry out this invasion alone and for the first time in its history, NATO took action within the scope of Article 5 and engaged in a collective intervention. The point reached at the end of the 20-year invasion, where humanitarian loss and economic costs are too heavy to be overcome, the US, who sat at the table with the Taliban, quickly retreated from the region by leaving everything else -once again- just as how it was while disappointing its NATO allies.

Key Words: Afghanistan, the US, Russia, Taliban, Terror.

ABD Öncülüğünde Afganistan’da Yürütölen “Teröre Karşı Savaş”: 2001-2021

Öz

Soğuk Savaş döneminde ABD, Afganistan’ı işgal eden Sovyetler Birliği’ne karşı İslami cihatçılığı körüklemek suretiyle bölgedeki silahlı grupları eğitim ve mühimmat bakımından desteklemiřti. Sovyet işgalinin başarısız bir şekilde sona ermesini müteakip ABD, desteklemiř olduđu silahlı grupları öylece kendi haline bırakmak suretiyle bölgeden çekilmiş ve bu durum zamanla tüm dünya için tehdit oluřturmaya başlamıřtır. Nitekim 11 Eylül saldırıları ile birlikte ABD kendi politikasının en büyük hedeflerinden ve mağdurlarından biri haline gelmiş ve Afganistan, 11 Eylül saldırılarının akabinde Bush Doktrini çerçevesinde terör örgütleriyle mücadele etmek ve terörizmi besleyip destekleyen ölkelere demokrasi götürmek üzere ABD’nin işgal ettiđi ölkelerden biri olmuřtur. Bu işgali ABD tek başına yürütmemiş, NATO, tarihinde ilk kez 5. Madde kapsamında harekete geçerek toplu bir müdahaleye girişilmiştir. İnsani kayıp ve ekonomik maliyeti altından kalkılamayacak kadar ağır olan 20 yıllık işgalin sonunda gelinen nokta ise Taliban ile masaya oturan ABD’nin bir anda her şeyi -bir kez daha- öylece bırakarak ve NATO müttefiklerini hayal kırıklığına uğratarak bölgeden hızlıca geri çekilmesi oldu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afganistan, ABD, Rusya, Taliban, Terör


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Introduction

Afghanistan, having significant geopolitics spanning through South and Central Asia and the Middle East, has hosted different civilizations for almost five thousand years and has been exposed to numerous invasions. Although the country has difficult conditions in terms of the vitality of the land it owns, it has always been an indispensable place in the struggle of the sovereign powers with different goals and in their policies of balancing each other. In order to reach the warm seas through India, Russia's way to conquer India had to pass through Asia and inevitably from Afghanistan (McCauley, 2002, p. 60-126). Britain, who wanted to prevent Russia from gaining this power, which is called the Great game, acutely decided to do this before Russia and invaded Afghanistan three times in the 19th century; however, it failed in all three of its attempts. These three unsuccessful invasion attempts caused great damage to Britain in terms of material, moral and human, pointed to a great defeat for Britain both as regards to military prestige and politics while though tendering an indirect gain in the matter of preventing Russia from reaching its goals. Due to internal turmoils, constantly erupted in the devastated country at the end of each occupation, serious problems arose in the establishment of political stability in Afghanistan.

In the 20th century, Soviet Union, one of the poles of the Cold War, carried out some ideological activities in Asia in order to expand its communist sphere of influence and the invasion of Afghanistan was at the forefront of these activities. At the end of the Russian occupation, which began in 1979 and ended in 1989, more than 1 million Afghans lost their lives, 3 million were injured or maimed, 5 million left the country of which more than 3 million never returned to their country (Deveci, 2018). This occupation also functioned as a part of the balance game between the poles of the period. While Russia was seeking to expand its field against the United States (US), the US encouraged the radical interpretation of Islam and trained Islamic jihadists to fight against Russia in the region by supporting them in many ways. With the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of Soviet Union, when the communist danger in the region disappeared, the US retreated, leaving the jihadists that it had trained and nurtured in the region and Afghanistan was once again dragged into civil war and the Afghan people tried to repair the destruction caused by this occupation for many years.

After the Cold War, the world has faced with two major problems: terrorism and mass migration. The US was not a far-flung player in the terrorist incidents that has emerged and swept the whole world. After all, the US pioneered the emergence of a new understanding of terrorism in order to balance the expansionist policy of Soviet Union, which is called "New Great Game" and sowed the first seeds in Afghanistan that would make jihadism functional in the political arena. The US has been one of the biggest victims of jihadism, which spread rapidly to different parts of the world, manifested itself in different names and forms and easily found supporters especially in oppressed and backward societies. 9/11, having been the deadliest terrorist act in the World history (Morgan, 2009, p. 222), was held by 19 hijackers of murder suicide with al-Qaeda and during the attacks 2,977 people were killed while more than 6,000 were injured (Plumer, 2013). Following the attacks, Bush administration proclaimed the Bush Doctrine declaring the legitimacy of preventive strike and stressing the concept of war on terror. Within the framework of the doctrine, the US, which received the support of the UN and NATO, announced that it would fight against terrorism and the countries that support terrorism and in this context it started the invasion of Afghanistan. Shortly after the intervention began, the Taliban administration in Afghanistan was overthrown and replaced by a provisional government of coalition forces (Baig, & Muhammad, 2020). When the Taliban government was overthrown in 2001, the Taliban was on the sanction list of the UN and accepted as having close ties with terror organizations and it was in the terror list of some other coalition partners. Though it was known that Al Qaeda, which carried out the 9/11 attacks and Taliban had ideological affinity, the Taliban was not included in the NATO, US and UK's terror lists. Whereas, in mid-2011, shortly after Obama announced the partial withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, the UN Security Council abruptly separated the al-Qaeda and Taliban sanction lists. Undoubtedly, this sudden return of the UN, which displayed a policy in line with the American policy, signalled that it would be possible to sit down and negotiate with the Taliban. Ultimately, an agreement was signed between the US and the Taliban on February 29, 2020 in which Afghanistan government was not an official party. With this agreement, which was signed with the aim of bringing peace to Afghanistan, the coalition forces, which withdrew completely from Afghanistan in 2021 under the leadership of the US, were actually accepting a major defeat. Handing over the government to Taliban,

which the coalition forces overthrew in 2001, after a 20-year period, in order to bring peace to Afghanistan, raises serious doubts and points to contradictions in America's war on terror.

Afghanistan, a swamp of superpowers, has inflicted a great defeat and loss of prestige on the US in the 21st century. 20 years of large-scale operations in Afghanistan and efforts to build a Western-style administration were found unsuccessful by its practitioners and Afghanistan was left to its former fate. In this study, the balancing policies of the great powers carried out over Afghanistan since the last periods of the Cold War and the results of these policies extending to the present are analysed. Furthermore, it is explained that the world order, evolved from bipolarity to unipolarity under the leadership of the US for a short while following the collapse of the Soviet Union, is now evolving into multipolarity as a result of the policies of the US and terrorist groups seems to constitute one of these poles.

Afghanistan during Cold War and History of the Taliban

Britain invaded Afghanistan three times in the 19th century, but was not successful in any of them, but its only gain was to prevent the Russians from landing in India. Afghanistan was, indeed, used as a buffer by the British against a feared Russian expansionism (Subramanian, 2021). Among the legacy of these occupations, the Durand Line is undoubtedly the most terrible one left by the British, who tried to move easily in Afghanistan and turn the region's multi-ethnic structure in favour of its aims while leaving the strategic Khyber Pass on British side. The British withdrawal from the subcontinent after partitioning it into two skewed states, Pakistan and India and Afghanistan's tense relations with Pakistan over the Durand Line and Pashtunistan, created complicated impetus in the region (Siddiqui, & Butt, 2014, p. 619). The Durand Line agreement, struck in 1893 between Britain and Afghanistan and has become a point of contention between the political regimes of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the remaining Pashtun tribesmen from the day it was signed (Runion, 2007, p. 95), imposed a 2640-kilometer-long permeable frontier that separates Afghanistan from Pakistan's semiautonomous clannish territories (Siddiqui, & Butt, 2014, p. 619). During the Cold War years, this line between Afghanistan, who were close to the Eastern Bloc; and Pakistan, who preferred to be allied with the West due to its historical rivalry with India (Burget, 2013, p. 61), has not only caused serious problems between Pakistan and Afghanistan dividing the Pashtuns, but naturally, it has become an important instrument in the hands of the great powers seeking different balance and power policies over and through these countries.

The British retreat, after failed invasions, had the immediate effect of depriving Afghanistan of a counterbalance in its dealings with the Soviet Union (Siddiqui, & Butt, 2014, p. 619). With the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution Soviet Union got closer to Afghanistan as part of its policy of developing friendships with neighbouring Muslim countries in order to prevent a possible uprising of the Muslim minority in its lands and to make room for itself against Britain (Runion, 2007, p. 90). In 1921, Amanullah Khan, who was ruling the country during that period, signed a friendship agreement with the Soviet Union which could be regarded as a move to prevent a possible Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and with this agreement, he established the Soviet balance against British influence (Balci, 2010, p. 383-84).

The Cold War had already erupted when Afghanistan, who spent the first half of the 20th century with political reforms on the one hand and endless internal conflicts on the other, finally began to erase the traces of the wars. In the wake of the Cold War in 1946, Afghan Prime Minister Shah Mohammad Khan declared that "he was convinced that the US could guarantee his country's security" (Collins, 1986). Soviet Union was more explicit in its Afghan policy which could be summarized as deterring Afghanistan from acting as a groundwork of an opposed power (Rubenstein, 1982). After late 1950s, while Cold War was going on, the Soviets played a critical role in Afghanistan's development and modernisation and no Kabul government, monarchical or republican, attempted to adopt policies that were detrimental to Soviet interests (Siddiqui, & Butt, 2014, p. 625). Afghanistan also supported the Eisenhower doctrine, which was accepted and entered into force by the US Congress in 1957, including the provision of military and economic aid to the Middle East countries and engagement of the armed forces in case of an attack from the communist bloc on the friendly nations. The main purpose of Afghanistan was not only to engage the US in Afghanistan's economic development but also and more significantly, to attain US support for maintaining Afghanistan's political independence (Ghaus, 1988). Afghanistan, indeed, sought close relations with the Soviets in case of a threat from Pakistan, while taking care to keep good relations with the US (Djalili, & Kellner, 2009, 405). However, as the Cold War escalated, Soviet Union and the US started to aggressively cooperate with many countries and devise policies aimed at attracting them to their side in order to expand their spheres of influence and surround their rivals or narrow each other's sphere

of influence. In this process, more than one hundred countries who did not want to get closer to or take a stand against any of the poles joined the Non-Aligned Movement and stated that they would not become a party to this war and they would not support or hostile to one side. One of these countries was Afghanistan for whom the non-alignment did not last long. When the pro-Soviet regime that came to power in 1978 could not find support from a part of Afghan people due to the policies it followed, uprisings and rebellions began. Upon the government's support request from Soviet Union to quell the rebellions, Afghanistan was occupied by Soviet Union at the end of 1979 -it could be regarded as sort of at the invitation of the Afghan government.

The US had already begun supporting the anti-communist opposition before the Soviet intervention with the thought that it would symbolize a victory for American policy and if the Soviet Union were defeated in Afghanistan, then its prestige could be eroded elsewhere (McCauley, 2002, p. 77-78). William Casey, then-US President Reagan's CIA director, saw the Soviet intervention as a tremendous opportunity for America to gain strategic advantage in South Asia: Afghanistan would not only become the Kremlin's Vietnam, but the economic and military cost of the invasion would completely drain the already weakened strength of Kremlin (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 293). The US chose to take advantage of Muslims by activating the Green Belt Project to surround the Soviet Union and prevent it from crossing to the South (Şahin, 2008, p. 45). Bringing political Islam to the fore, the US supported Islamist groups against both the Soviet Union and the pro-Soviet, anti-Western and pro-independence local nationalists (Şahin, 2008, p. 45). The rhetoric that the US put forward was quite persuasive for a community of having religious beliefs: Soviet Union, described as "infidel, atheist, godless and evil empire" (Ribuffo, 2005, p. 14), had captured the Muslim Afghanistan and *jihad* was an important tool of Islam and the invasion of Afghanistan was an opportunity for Muslims to fulfil their *jihadist* mission that they had neglected for many years (Şahin, 2008, p. 45). During the 1980s, covert operations were undertaken by the US in Afghanistan on behalf of the Afghan "*mujahideen*", or "freedom fighters" as they were then known in Washington, functioned as the key element in reducing the Soviet Union's sphere of influence (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 293). Islamic discourses were also an excellent helper in serving this policy.

It was also strategically important for Pakistan to stop the Soviet expansion in Afghanistan, so the Afghan-Pakistani border, which was highly transitive both ethnically, religiously and physically, gained great functional importance in favour of the US during this period. Afghan refugees, whose numbers were expressed in millions, started to receive special education in madrasahs in Pakistan through the borders they could easily cross. Within the framework of the "Hurricane Plan" based on the idea to supporting radical Islamic organizations in response to Soviet progress, the number of *madrasahs* (traditional Islamic schools) in Pakistan jumped from around 7,000 to 35,000 (Uslubaş, 2010, p. 112). Although the Taliban emerged in 1994 as one of the prominent factions in the Afghan Civil War following the retreat of the Soviet Union (CISAC, 2018), its roots date back even earlier. The Taliban, whose members are consisted of mostly Pashtuns in the south of the country and the children of refugee families studying in *madrasahs* in Pakistan (Bag, 2021), has been made up of student communities who receive Islamic education in Deoband *madrasahs* along the border of Pakistan and their ultimate goal is to cleanse and purify the society by establishing an Afghan state governed by *sharia* in Afghanistan (Clements, 2003). In fact, the origin of these schools is based on the "*Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind*" organization, which was founded by Indian Muslims in 1919 in India (Deoband), affected both Afghanistan and Pakistan in the struggle against British colonialism and contributed greatly to Pakistan's becoming a state (Sönmez, Bozbaş, & Konaşul, 2020, p. 63). These schools, named as Deoband *madrasahs*, gained a different identity in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion (Sönmez, Bozbaş, & Konaşul, 2020, p. 63) and by influencing Afghan *alims* (Islamic scholars) constituted great importance in the formation of the Taliban (Saray, 1997).

The economic resources of the Taliban, who defines Islamic jihad as a "divine obligation" exactly as planned by the US and encourages jihad by stating that not supporting jihad is a great sin (Roggio, & Weiss, 2017) basically depend on the support received by the mujahideen under CIA programs during the Soviet occupation (Fitchett, 2001). The weakening of Soviet Russia was so important that the few billion dollars needed to support the mujahideen would have been well spent, even if some amount of that money financed dark figures like Osama bin Laden with vague agendas (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 293). The CIA poured \$3.2 billion to train and equip nearly 80,000 mujahideen, 35,000 of whom were Arabs, until 1989 and with the contributions of the Saudis and China, the figure reached 6-12 billion dollars (Taştekin, 2021).

The two superpowers of the Cold War era, which did not come into direct confrontation, almost waged a proxy war on the territory of Afghanistan. Political Islam received great support in this struggle of the US and it emerged as a result of the global power struggle and a product of modern times (Şahin, 2008, p. 46). In this context, it is possible to say that political Islam is one of the outputs of the US's strategy to win the Cold War (Mamdani, 2005, p. 23). But the clarity of the American administration's purpose was blurred when Soviet tanks left Afghanistan in 1989 and the Soviet Union's upside-down spiral began (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 293). Once again, Afghanistan was left alone with the deep wounds left behind by the occupation. For the US, which suddenly stopped being interested in Afghanistan in line with its reshaped interests and turned to other areas, what would happen next was up to the Afghans (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 293). After years of internal conflicts, economic difficulties and political contradictories; Taliban declared its official establishment in 1994 and began to rule a large part of the country after 1996. After the Taliban seized power, the internal conflicts in the country turned from a power struggle to an ethnic war and with the support of al-Qaeda, the Taliban took control of nearly 90 percent of the country (Sadat, 2020). On completion of 1994, around 12,000 young Afghani and Pakistani students had joined the Taliban constraining the most rigorous elucidation of Islam and they immediately closed girls' schools, women were forced to stay home TV sets were crashed, music frowned upon and all males were imposed to give up shaving and growing long beards (McCauley, 2002, p. 79). During their leadership from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban and their allies massacred Afghan civilians, refused UN food aid to 160,000 starving civilians and implemented a scorched-earth policy, burning broad swaths of arable land and razing tens of thousands of homes (Rashid, 2002, p. 253; Gargan, 2001).

When the US invaded Afghanistan in the beginning of the 21st century, the Taliban administration, who had been sheltered the perpetrator of 9/11 attacks, al-Qaeda, was in its 5th year. Meanwhile, Afghanistan was tired of fighting first against the Soviet invaders and then against the local dictators inside and much of the country's infrastructure -roads, bridges, electrical service, communications systems, schools and hospitals- were damaged or destroyed in these conflicts (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 292-293). During Russian invasion and following civil war more than 1 million Afghans lost their lives, 3 million were injured or maimed; 5 million left the country of which more than 3 million never returned to their country (Deveci, 2018). With a national income of less than \$1000 and a literacy rate of less than 40%, people in the country had the shortest average life expectancy (43 years) in the world (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 293).

The 9/11 Attacks and Invasion of Afghanistan

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US withdrawal from the region, leaving the trained *mujahideen* and weapons in Afghanistan and leaving Afghanistan to its fate, caused anarchy and chaos shaped around the power struggle in the ethnically and religiously fragile society. Friendly relations were tried to be established during the Bill Clinton era with the Taliban, who suppressed religious movements that did not follow the laws of *Sharia* and expelled dozens of international aid organizations and the US government offered political and economic support to the Taliban in return for handing over Osama Bin Laden (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 294-295). But the Taliban chose to protect al-Qaeda and the United States did not go too far, as it focused on other political issues. The Taliban had always been a convenient partner for al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, even though they had no organic ties in the organizational sense.

The conflicts and divisions in Afghanistan did not end with the Taliban regime's domination. The Northern Movement, which had previously fought against the invading Soviet forces and whose members were mostly Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen, faced the Taliban after the Russian invasion. The movement was defending the right of women to education and striving to prevent the people from being oppressed under the *sharia* rule. Ahmad Shah Massoud, the leader of the movement and the biggest opposition to the Taliban, was killed by two al-Qaeda members on September 9, 2001 and the assassination strengthened the belief that al-Qaeda and the Taliban were acting together (CISAC, 2018). With the 9/11 attacks that took place exactly two days after this assassination, Afghanistan would now host a new invader: the US

9/11 terrorist attacks, held by Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda in 2001, was the deadliest terrorist attacks on US territories and caused 2,974 deaths, excluding 19 terrorists (Bergen, 2001). Whereas 1975 and 2001, only 17 murders committed by 16 foreign-born terrorists of a total of 64 who either tried or were successful in their attacks in the US (Nowrasteh, 2016, p. 6). This attack, which is the result of Islamic terrorism and which suddenly directed the attention and hatred of the whole world, notably the

American people, had a significant leverage effect, accelerating the *de facto* entry of the US into regions it already wanted to be more involved in the game.

Just after one day following the attacks, NATO approved and launched at jet speed the Article 5 for the first time in its history which was referring that an attack on one of its allies would be considered an attack on all members (Rühle, 2011) and multinational organizations, including the UN, placed counter-terrorism at the top of their security agendas (Sadık, & İspir, 2021, p. 129). Having the international community at the back, the US's first military response to these terrorist attacks targeted the Afghan government because if al-Qaeda terrorists were to be caught, the Afghan government had to be overthrown and made a "safe place for democracy" (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 292). Upon the Taliban, ruled Afghanistan until 2001, refused to hand over Osama bin Laden after the 9/11 attacks, the US-led coalition forces, with the help of the Northern Alliance, invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the regime (Zachary, 2014). Within almost a month, the Taliban regime had been overthrown and the Taliban retreated to the mountainous regions of Afghanistan along the Pakistani border. From this date on, the work of establishing a new administration in Afghanistan was undertaken. According to American leaders, Afghanistan had to be transformed into a Western-style democracy with a constitution, elected leaders and a legal system that protected human rights, because the formation of a democratic Afghanistan that would be friendlier to the West would bring greater security to the United States and its allies (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 298).

The coalition acted with the aim of ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan and after overthrowing the Taliban, he appointed Hamid Karzai as the head of the interim government as a result of UN Security Council's Resolution 1386 (UNSC, 2001) at a conference held in Bonn, Germany. Appropriately, he became Afghanistan's first elected president in the 2004 presidential election (Aleem, 2011, p. 23). However, when the people went to the polls to elect their members of parliament this time in 2005, a sad picture emerged: the newly elected deputies, who had to be at least 25% women according to the new electoral laws, did not even know the principles of democracy and how the Western designed parliament worked (Gall, 2005). But it would not be abandoned, the democratization of Afghanistan would dry up one of the sources of terrorism and the world would become a safer place for the West. In pursuit of this aim, it was tried to provide trainings at all levels in all institutions in order to teach and place the values of the West. However, despite all efforts, the targeted economic and political stability and peace and security environment were not able to dominate the country as the fight for power sharing in Afghanistan, which took on an ethnic colour, weakened the legitimacy of the newly established regime, while on the other hand, with the re-emergence of the Taliban, who had been silent in the first years, the problems in the country started to increase again (Aleem, 2011, p. 23).

Political reforms, in time, have exposed the problem of military dominance in Afghanistan, which is deeply divided by the power struggle between regional groups, predominantly Pashtuns in the South and members of the Northern Alliance (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 298). In 2003, when the US announced the end of the Great War in Afghanistan, the NATO International Security Assistance Force entered the region, taking responsibility for the coalition (Sönmez, Bozbař, & Konuřul, 2020, p. 68). With the entry of NATO into the field in 2003, the dose of opposition began to increase with the pressure on the anti-government structures in Afghanistan. By 2005, with the egress of suicide bombers in the border areas with Pakistan, it became critical and clear that the foundations of the new regime, which was just trying to be introduced, began to shake (Semple, 2012, p. 66). Karzai's dominance in Afghanistan only partly crossed the borders of the capital, Kabul. Therefore, the Taliban movement, which lacked the capacity to wage a conventional war, was mostly limited to an insurgency movement and its dominance in the southern regions of Afghanistan was possible not because of the strong position of the Taliban, but because of the inadequacy of the Afghan state in security and economic areas (Peters, 2009, p. 7-17). The response of the US to the Taliban attacks, which continued by increasing the dose and number in the aftermath of 2004, was to increase the number of US soldiers, the number of whom reached 100,000 by 2009 (CISAC, 2018).

The institutional influence and prestige of the Afghan administration, which went in the opposite direction with the large amounts of military and economic capacity transferred to the region, brought corruption and distortion in many areas over time. When coalition forces first entered Afghanistan, Taliban's ban for poppy cultivation had remained in force for 15 months; however, a rapid and uncontrolled cultivation re-started especially in the south (98% of poppy crop was grown in 6 southern

cities), where the authority of Afghan government and security conditions were poor (Peters, 2009, p. 4-5). As of January 2009, much of southern Afghanistan was wide open and according to NATO's aide in the region, Taliban fighters in the Kandahar region were making an estimated \$300 million profits from illegal opium production and spending this money on machine guns, bombs and missile launchers to wear out and weaken the central government (Filkins, 2009). With the spread of illegal trade and the inability to control illegal activities, bribery and frauds, occasional clashes between Afghan security forces and NATO soldiers, the increasing attacks of Taliban and the economic and military losses of the allies began to be questioned by their own people, making the situation more difficult for the US. Frauds and illegal activities had reached such an extreme level that rumours of cooperation with the Taliban who were targeting coalition soldiers and Afghan civilians began to be spoken loudly. In 2009, Hillary Clinton, then-Secretary of State, declared that one of the key sources of income for the Taliban was the protection money paid out of US transportation contracts (Hartung, 2021). History was repeating itself in the same cycle. American forces were soon entangled in the same mountainous terrain and incomprehensible tribal society that had previously hampered the imperial ambitions of Britain and the Soviet Union (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 292). Now it was time for America to re-evaluate the terms and develop a new discourse.

Deal with the Taliban and Withdrawal from Afghanistan

Just in the aftermath of Karzai's appointment, at the end of 2001, a Taliban delegation met with Afghan President Karzai, expressing their willingness to lay down their weapons in exchange for immunity and presented him a letter, possibly signed by their supreme commander Mullah Omar, outlining how the group could disband peacefully (Dobbins, & Malkasian, 2015, p. 53). Although Karzai informed the US about the content of this meeting and the demands of the Taliban, the Taliban's attempt was inconclusive as the US did not respond to this request. Because of the 9/11 attacks, then President Bush said that no nation should negotiate with terrorists and this ban was actively implemented until 2009 (Sheikh, & Greenwood, 2013). Another goodwill move came from the Karzai front in 2005; over the course of four years, Karzai government established a reconciliation commission that reintegrated more than 7,000 Taliban combatants and released of hundreds of Taliban prisoners (Weinbaum, & Majidyar, 2019). Between 2001 and 2010, until President Obama held a meeting with Karzai in Washington and withdrew the Bush-era ban on negotiating with Taliban, many occasions and opportunities had been missed with regards to peace talks (Dobbins, & Malkasian, 2015, p. 53).

However, when things started to spiral in Afghanistan, it was the US that first broke the ban it had imposed earlier. In this regard, the first real attempt to persuade the Taliban to peace in Afghanistan was the establishment of the Afghan High Peace Council in 2010 (HPC) (Sönmez, Bozbaş, & Konaşul, 2020, p. 69). Of course, from 2001 to 2010, the Taliban's hand had got stronger and its sphere of influence had expanded, while the US was in a deadlock compared to 2001 and was looking for a way out of the region. This new situation that the parties had come would undoubtedly affect the course of the negotiations.

Obama's plan was to withdraw from Afghanistan gradually since he took office, therefore, the establishment of the Council and achieving its purpose by becoming operational would also serve to withdraw the US forces from Afghanistan. However, the formation of the HPC had brought concerns with it regarding its possible success from the first day. Civil societies and some members of the Afghan society, notable women and rights activists, often criticized the government for assigning warlords and *jihadist* to bring peace while, according to them, they themselves were actively involved in civil wars that caused the death of thousands of people and destructed the country (Taieb, 2020). In fact, the names in the HPC consisted mostly of people who had fought with the Taliban in the past and the discourse used in the objections also included some of the provocative claims of the Taliban. As a matter of fact, the assassination actions of the Taliban in the following years confirm this view. In 2011, Afghan government's spokesman Burhanuddin Rabbani, one of former leaders of the Northern Alliance and the appointed head of the HPC and in 2012 his successor, Arsala Rahmani, who was working as acting HPC head, were assassinated by Taliban (Ruttig, 2016). Although Karzai wanted to stop the talks with the Taliban on these developments, the US was in favour of the continuation of the process.

HPC remained passive in its course, not taking any major strides, but rather carrying out some improvement and integration projects. During this time, the United States took steps to lay the groundwork for negotiations with the Taliban and the legal basis for the 2021 withdrawal. The first step in this direction came from the UN, which shaped its Afghan policies in line with the policies of the US from the very beginning. With the UNSC resolution numbered 1989 on 17 June 2011, it separated the al-

Qaeda and Taliban sanction lists from each other (UNSC, 2011), which had been included in the same sanction list under resolution 1276 in 1999 (UNSC, 1999). However, in the UN's own report, the Taliban had been defined as responsible for 76% of civilian deaths in 2009 and 80% in 2011 (UN Human Rights Council, 2014). Just 5 days after the decision of the UNSC, which paved the way for direct political talks with the Taliban, President Obama announced the partial withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan (The White House, 2011). Upon these developments the Council opened a political office for the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, to provide an official address to the Taliban within the framework of ongoing negotiations (Shafiqi, 2019). But when Taliban hung a flag and a signboard written "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" on in front of the office, the planned meetings between the Afghan government and the Taliban in Doha in 2013 failed before they started, the Afghan government withdrew from the negotiations, the office established in Doha was closed and peace negotiations were suspended (Sadat, 2019).

The situation in Afghanistan was getting more and more chaotic every passing day. Amid growing conflicts between NATO and Afghan security forces and Karzai's continued efforts to gain dominance within his own country, Obama announced that American forces would have withdrawn completely from Afghanistan by 2014 (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 335). However, since France, one of the coalition allies, announced that it would withdraw its troops by the end of 2013, the Pentagon revised this plan by announcing that the combat mission in the United States would be completed by the end of 2013 (Hook, & Spanier, 2013, p. 335). The situation in Afghanistan was now causing a discontent among the allies.

Although the Afghan government expressed its readiness to establish a ceasefire and start official talks to end the war (Sharifi & Adamou, 2018), the Taliban stated that they would no longer negotiate with the Afghan government because it would provide legitimacy to the Kabul government (Qazi, 2019). With the complete elimination of the Afghan government, direct negotiations between the US and the Taliban began in December, 2018. Subsequently, although the Taliban's bomb attacks on American soldiers suspended the negotiations for a while (Sadat, 2019), a peace agreement was signed in Doha on February 29, 2020, without the Afghan government as a signatory or a party and which regulates the American withdrawal schedule from Afghanistan. With the agreement, the US announced to the whole world that its only official interlocutor in Afghanistan was the Taliban and it disappointed both the Afghan government it had established with its own hands and its allies, who still had the Taliban on their terrorist lists. Although the details and stages of the withdrawal were specified stage by stage in the agreement, the withdrawal, which the US had envisaged as 14 months, took place so quickly and hastily at the end of the 19-month period that the 20-year existence of the US in Afghanistan became meaningless and almost turned into an escape operation.

In the meantime, contrary to the claims of the US, which considered the Taliban as its official interlocutor, the fact that the Taliban followed the same steps as its previous administration, which started in 1996, as soon as it entered Kabul (announced the same restrictions and rules of *sharia*) and the sudden mass migration crisis, more serious than the ones during the Russian occupation period and the following civil war, has been met with anxiety and fear all over the world. At the call of the US, many countries, including NATO and the UN, supported the invasion of Afghanistan and sided with the US for exactly 20 years, inflicting countless losses. But after 20 years of unsuccessful experience, the US suddenly withdrew without consensus with its allies, surrendering the country to the Taliban, whom they overthrew 20 years ago. The US once again used Afghanistan and the Afghan people to facilitate its own policy of interests and then left them to their own fate once again.

Afghanistan, which the British and then the Russians invaded and failed before, defeated America in this century as well. But the cost of this war and defeat was huge not only for Afghanistan but also for America. Since the commencement of the Afghan war, the Pentagon has spent for its "war on terror" (including the amount spent in Iraq) over \$14 trillion, with military contractors receiving one-third to half of the total (Hartung, 2021). But this only refers to the expenditures made so far. The costs of caring for post-9/11 combat vets (20,666) is estimated to reach between \$2.2 and \$2.5 trillion by 2050, as veterans continue to face enormous physical and mental costs as a result of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq (Bilmes, 2021). The humanitarian dimension of the war, which was inconclusive and had serious consequences for all its sides, is another reason for questioning the point reached. The unsuccessful and inconclusive experience, in other words, the US's terror policy and the will to export democracy, cost a total of 20,666 wounded and 171-174,000 deaths, including 47,245 civilians, 66-69,000 police and soldiers (of whom 2,442 are American and 1,144 are NATO allies' soldiers) and 51,000 opposition fighters;

(Taştekin, 2021). Afghanistan, which had been occupied to bring stability and end terrorism, still maintains its first place in the Global Terrorism Index (GTI, 2020, p. 18) report and agonises under rules and/or armed conflicts of different radicals.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Afghanistan has been the land of ethnic and religious internal conflicts and balancing policies of global powers due to its ethnic diversity and the fragility caused by this diversity, as well as its strategic geopolitical location. In the last three centuries, although the three superpowers of the world, Britain, Russia and the US, were devastated; weakened and left Afghanistan with great losses, both before and after each great war, the land was exposed to civil wars. During the occupations, the great powers that wanted to break each other's power, instead of being on the side of the Afghan people, fuelled the war environment so that their opponent, who had entered the region, would leave the region weakened, which led to the worsening of the situation of the Afghan people. Afghanistan, suffering from conflict, natural disasters, chronic poverty and food insecurity for more than 40 years, has one of the largest refugee populations worldwide (UNHCR, 2021), remains at the top of the list of countries most affected both by terrorism and its economic cost throughout the 2000s (GTI, 2020, p. 18-32) and its life expectancy is still far below the world average (WB, 2021) after 20 years of Western experience.

NATO allies, promising to cleanse Afghanistan from terrorism and democratize the region by siding with the US, allowed (or watched) the US to negotiate with the Taliban after a 20-year intricate and enigmatic occupation and subsequently withdrew the region by handing over Afghanistan to the Taliban. Having declared *global war on terror* immediately after the 9/11 attacks, the US had overthrown Taliban regime, sheltering al Qaeda, in 2001. But now they have handed over the fate of the Afghans to the Taliban, who, according to UN reports, have been responsible for the most casualties and acts of terrorism in the country and whom the US had previously fought, under conditions not much different from the one in 2001.

What made the American occupation different from the previous one was that the conditions were very different in favour of the invading country? The Soviets had entered Afghanistan at the most difficult time of the Cold War and under the leadership of the US, the Western world and the entire Islamic world were against the Soviets, though; the US and NATO had entered Afghanistan with full support of the West almost no rejection of the Islamic world in the unipolar world unopposed and they left the region devastated, without leaving even an Afghan government behind (Ünal, 2021).

The US-Taliban accord was a daring gamble on the part of the US as less than two decades after the start of the Gulf War, the US engaged discreetly with a man it had previously identified as a significant target in the *global war on terror* (Semple, 2020, p. 89). America's hasty and unsuccessful withdrawal, of course, corresponds to a breaking point in international politics. The end of the occupation, which cost trillions of dollars and nearly 200,000 lives, has reached an agreement with Taliban and the Taliban was/is defined as a terrorist organization by a significant part of its allies. This contradiction represents the end of an era in aspect of the US, both in the eyes of its allies and in its place in the global system. Bipolar ordered Cold War had ended with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and evolved into a unipolar order dominated by the US. However; the argument summarized as "...in a unipolar system the dominant power will benefit from its own reputation by trying to take advantage of the weaker states, the increasing cost of maintaining the dominance will consume the world-wide sovereign, other countries that are not satisfied with the order will try to reduce the sovereign power and therefore the unipolar order will be temporary and a return to a bipolar or multi-polar world would create a genuine balance of power..." (Gilpin, 1981; Waltz, 1959) showed itself in this experience. Disappointing its allies and revealing its unreliability, a globally discredited, war-lost America withdrew from Afghanistan by declaring the end of the unipolar system, which had a 30-year lifespan after the Cold War. In this 30-year period, the US acted unilaterally, not as a unipolar one which led to the eroding of its power, the increase in the cost of occupation and the loss of trust and support of his own people. It seems that a new order will emerge in which multipolarity is dominant and in which countries might take quick actions to determine or consolidate their places in this new post-Western order. It should not be underestimated that one of these poles seems to be constituted of terrorist organizations. And especially after the example of the Taliban, who tried to bring the world to heel with terrorist activities and managed to sit around the table with the US and took over the administration as they increased the dose and number of their actions; the possibility that terrorist organizations might become more aggressive should not be ignored.

On the other hand, with this failed initiative of the US, the thesis based on the idea that exporting Western-led administrations would end the atmosphere of insecurity and terror, has become open to debates. Actions, without taking the dynamics of countries, regions and nations into account -even if it is a democratization movement- might fail and even push the situation further back. Although the US had shown promising policies in Afghanistan at first, the failure of its inability to use this power properly caused both its allies to lose their trust and the fear of his enemies to end -or at least to lose previous influence- in the process. Possible consequences of political Islam and its *jihadist* interpretation that the US introduced and nurtured in order to overthrow Soviet Russia had not been well-thought out from the start while it had been planned as the path to defeat Soviets and later used as the main reason to establish liberal democracy. Moderate Islam, introduced after the 9/11 attacks as the new version seems to be in the agenda of the US in its Middle East policy. Though, in this new order, which version/interpretation of Islam will the US start to use as a means to serve its political purposes in line with its own interests is another issue of wonder.

So, what are the possible developments at the regional and global level after the US withdrew from Afghanistan after 20 years of adventure and the Taliban took control effortlessly? What will Russia do now after the failure of the US, which previously supported radical Islamist organizations for Russia's failure? It should be remembered that Russia, stated after the Cold War that it had the right to protect all former Soviet regions and declared the region as its habitat while emphasizing the national interests of its immediate surroundings which are of vital importance to Russia (Purtař, 2006, p. 166). Pursuing a regional foreign policy focused on preventing foreign forces from entering the region and seeking to weaken the US, Russia, will of course continue to search for sphere of influence and allies in the region. Russia, which has the Taliban on the list of terrorist organizations, is currently monitoring the situation in the region. However; while many Western countries, including the US, hectically evacuated their embassy staffs from Afghanistan in the wake of the Taliban's takeover, Russian embassy in Kabul, with more than 100 employees, have continued its work as usual and Russian diplomats have received direct assurance from the Taliban that they would be safe -same assurance were given to China and Pakistan (Pashaeva, 2021). Besides providing stability, potential cooperation and economic opportunities; having a new anti-American ally in the neighbourhood could always be useful for Russia (Pashaeva, 2021). Although they fought each other during the occupation in the Cold War period and even the Taliban supported the Chechen *mujahideen* against the Russians in 1999; in the last of the Russian-Taliban visits started in 2017 (just a month before the US withdrawal), the Taliban pledged not to pose a threat to Russia or its allies in Central Asia (Pashaeva, 2021).

It would also not be unreasonable to expect the deepening of the already unbroken relations between the Central Asian countries with Russia and the creation of new areas of cooperation in order to prevent the penetration of radical Islam into Central Asia, especially Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the neighbouring countries that have supported the Northern Alliance. Indeed, the fact that Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan held a large-scale joint military exercise in the region close to the Afghan border (AA, 2021) while the US military withdrawal was continuing and the Taliban was advancing towards Kabul could be considered as an important message given to the Taliban. Likewise, Russia can establish areas of closer and strategic cooperation with India and Iran in order to surround Pakistan, which had already troubled Russia about the Taliban issue and might at any moment cooperate closely with the US. The acceptance of Iran as a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization following the Taliban's entry into Kabul can be interpreted as a sign of this. Considering the capacity of the Shanghai cooperation organization to act jointly against radical groups, the fact that Pakistan, which is not very friendly with Iran and known for its support to the Taliban though having stayed with the US during its *war on terrorism*, is also involved in the organization might complicate the situation a bit. On the other hand, the fact that the Taliban have never recognized the Durand line, on which Pakistan has voiced on every platform and even stated in the UN as the only Muslim country that does not recognize Afghanistan's independence for a while and which Pakistan points it as the legitimate border line between the two countries while erecting fences over, creates an ambiguous image about the future of border relations between the countries.

From the perspective of the US, it could also be considered that the aggressive stance of the US in regional politics will follow a more moderate course. Because the US does not want to be dependent on the Middle East to meet its increasing oil needs. In this context, it is possible to carry out more collaborative policies towards Caspian basin countries of having strategic significance in terms of oil reserves -the 3rd largest after Russia and the Middle East (McCauley, 2002, p. 159).

And finally, there is the question of what awaits Afghanistan in this new order. If the Taliban wants to establish and maintain a government in Afghanistan in line with its own ideals, it must first be recognized, accepted and open to dialogue in the international arena. What kind of a communication style and discourse the Taliban will prefer to use with countries that have defined the Taliban as terrorist organization before is very important in this aspect. It is clear that the Taliban needs to develop a new language, but the willingness and capacity of the Taliban to do so are sceptical due to its previous experience of ruling Afghanistan. It should also not be ignored that in this second rule of the Taliban, which had not been able to bring peace, stability and peace order to the country during his previous rule between 1996 and 2001; could cause an intense-scale internal turmoil once again. Considering that internal turmoil is both a result and a reason for the intervention of great powers in the country, it is not difficult to foresee that Afghanistan's vulnerability, which is open to foreign intervention on a global scale, might continue.

Ethical Declaration

In the writing process of the study titled "*The US-led 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan: 2001-2021*", there were followed the scientific, ethical and the citation rules; was not made any falsification on the collected data and this study was not sent to any other academic media for evaluation. Since the document analysis is examined in this study, there is no requirement for an ethics committee decision.

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TÜRKÇE GENİŞ ÖZET

Güney ve Orta Asya ile Ortadoğu'ya uzanan önemli jeopolitiği olan Afganistan, yaklaşık beş bin yıldır farklı medeniyetlere ev sahipliği yapmış ve sayısız istilaya maruz kalmıştır. Ülke, sahip olduğu toprakların verimliliği bakımından çetin koşullara sahip olsa da, egemen güçlerin farklı amaçlar güden mücadelelerinde ve birbirlerini dengeleme politikalarında her zaman vazgeçilmez bir ülke olmuştur. 19. Yüzyılda Rusya'nın Hindistan üzerinden sıcak denizlere inmesini engellemek amacıyla üç kez İngilizlerin işgaline uğramış olan Afganistan, bu işgallerin hepsini savuşturmuş ve İngiltere'yi hem prestij hem de ekonomik bakımından ciddi şekilde zarar görmesine neden olmuştur. Rusya'nın idealine kavuşmasını engellemek ise İngiltere açısından tek teselli olmuştur. Yirminci yüzyılda bu defa Sovyet Rusya'nın -Afgan Hükümetinin yardım talebi üzerine- işgaline maruz kalan Afganistan 10 yıllık bir mücadelenin ardından Sovyetlerin yıpranmasına ve işgali sonlandırarak çekilmesine neden olmuştur. Soğuk Savaş döneminin çift kutuplu düzeninde iki büyük gücün birbirlerinin etki alanını daraltmak ve dolaylı yıpratma çabalarının en sıcak sahnelerinden birisi olan Afganistan, Amerika'nın Sovyetlere karşı cihat anlayışını ortaya çıkıp canlandırarak Sovyetleri yıkma projesinin parçası olmuş ve ABD siyasal İslam'ın tohumlarını atmıştır. Proje Sovyet işgalini sona erdirmeye başarılı olunca Amerika bir anda bölgeden öylece çekilmiş ve Afganistan'ı kaderine terk etmiştir.

Ne var ki büyütüp beslediği ve desteklediği radikal İslam, 11 Eylül terörist saldırıyla kendini hedef alacaktı. El Kaide'nin sorumlu olduğu saldırılardan sonra BM ve NATO'nun da desteğini alan ABD küresel ölçekte teröre karşı savaş ilan etmiş ve ilk olarak da Afganistan'ı işgal etmiştir. Her işgalin ardından iç savaflara gömülen ve durulamayan Afganistan Sovyet işgali sonrasında yaşanan yıkıcı iç savaflara maruz kalmış ve 1996-2001 yılları arasında Taliban tarafından yönetilmiştir. 2001 yılında Taliban'ı deviren koalisyon güçleri 20 yıllık bir mücadelenin sonunda devirmiş oldukları ve uğruna savaş verdikleri Taliban ile uzlaşıp ülke yönetimini adeta yeniden Taliban'a devrederek aniden bölgeden çıkıvermiştir. Böylelikle bir süper güçler bataklığı olan Afganistan, 21. yüzyılda da ABD'ye büyük bir yenilgi ve prestij kaybı yaşatmış oldu. Bu durumda Batı'nın, terörün kaynağı olabilecek ülkelere Batılı tarzda yönetimler ihraç edilerek güvenlik sorununun çözülebileceği ve terörün sona ereceği yönündeki tezi de Afganistan tecrübesi ile yenilgiye uğratılmış oldu. Afganistan'da 20 yıllık geniş çaplı operasyonlar ve Batı tarzı bir yönetim kurma çabaları bizzat kendi uygulayıcıları tarafından başarısız bulundu ve böylelikle Afganistan bir kez daha bir işgalden yenik bir zaferle çıkmış oldu. Çatışmalar, doğal afetler, kronik yoksulluk ve gıda güvensizliği ile boğuşan Afganistan, UNHCR verilerine göre dünya çapında en büyük mülteci nüfuslarından birine sahip olup, Dünya Terör Endeksi raporuna göre Batı kontrolünde bulunduğu 2000'li yıllar boyunca hem terörden hem de terörün getirdiği ekonomik maliyetten en çok etkilenen ülkeler listesinin başında yer almaya devam etmiştir, ortalama yaşam süresi ise hala dünya ortalamasının çok altında bulunmaktadır.

ABD-Taliban anlaşması, Körfez Savaşı'nın başlamasından yirmi yıldan daha kısa bir süre sonra ABD açısından cüretkâr bir kumardı çünkü ABD daha önce teröre karşı küresel savaşta önemli bir hedef olarak

belirlediđi ve 11 Eylöl saldırlarından sorumlu tuttuđu el-Kaide'nin bölgedeki iş birlikçisiyle masaya oturmaktaydı. Amerika'nın apar topar ve başarısız geri çekilmesi elbette uluslararası siyasette bir kırılma noktasına tekabül etmektedir. Trilyonlarca dolara ve 200.000'e yakın cana mal olan işgalin, müttefiklerinin önemli bir kısmı tarafından terör örgütü olarak tanımlanan Taliban'la anlaşma sağlanarak sona ermesi; ABD açısından hem müttefiklerinin gözünde hem de küresel sistemdeki yeri bağlamında bir devrin kapandığına işaret etmektedir. Çift kutuplu Soğuk Savaş Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasıyla sona ermiş ve ABD hegemonyasında tek kutuplu bir düzene geçilmişti. Realistlerin ön gördüğü üzere tek kutuplu bir sistemde, egemen güç; zayıf devletlerden yararlanmaya çalışarak kendi itibarının gücünü kullanacak, egemenliği sürdürmenin artan maliyeti dünya çapında egemeni tüketecek, durumdan memnun olmayan diğer ülkeler ise egemen gücü zayıflatmaya çalışacak ve bu nedenle tek kutuplu düzen geçici olacak, bu nedenle iki kutuplu veya çok kutuplu bir dünyaya dönüş gerçek bir güç dengesi yaratacaktı. İşte Afganistan deneyimi bu ön görüyü haklı çıkarttı. Müttefiklerini hayal kırıklığına uğratan ve güvenilmezliğini ortaya koyan, küresel ölçekte itibarını yitirmiş, savaştan yenik çıkmış bir Amerika, Soğuk Savaş'tan sonra 30 yıllık ömrü olan tek kutuplu sistemin adeta sonunu ilan etmiş oldu. Bu 30 yıllık süreçte ABD tek kutuplu değil, tek taraflı bir güç gibi davrandı daha çok, bu da gücünün aşınmasına, işgal maliyetlerinin artmasına, kendi halkının güven ve desteğinin kaybolmasına neden oldu.

Görünen o ki, çok kutupluluğun hâkim olduğu ve ülkelerin bu yeni Batı sonrası düzende yerlerini belirlemek veya pekiştirmek için hızlı adımlar atabilecekleri yeni bir düzen ortaya çıkmış durumda. Dünyayı terörist faaliyetlerle dize getirmeye çalışan ve eylemlerinin dozunu ve sayısını arttırdıkça ABD'yle masaya oturup yönetimi devralmayı başarmış olan Taliban örneğinden sonra, bu kutuplardan birini de terör örgütlerinin teşkil edebileceği gerçeği göz ardı edilmemelidir. Peki, ABD'nin 20 yıllık macerasından sonra Afganistan'ı kaosa ve bilinmezliğe terk etmesinden ve akabinde Taliban'ın zahmetsizce kontrolü ele geçirmesinden sonra bölgesel ve küresel düzeyde beklenen olası gelişmeler nelerdir? Daha önce Rusya'nın başarısız olması için radikal İslamcı örgütleri destekleyen ABD'nin başarısızlığı üzerine Rusya şimdi ne yapacak? ABD'nin ilk etapta bölge politikalarındaki agresif tutumunun daha mutedil bir seyir izleyeceği düşünülebilir. Çünkü ABD her geçen gün artan petrol ihtiyacını karşılamak konusunda Ortadoğu'ya bağımlı olmak istemiyor. Bu nedenle, siyasal İslam'ın bölgelerine girmesini istemeyen, doğalgaz ve petrol konusunda hem kaynak hem de güzergâh olan Orta Asya ülkeleri ile ilişkilerini bozmamaya gayret edecektir. Rusya, aynı şekilde, her an ABD ile yakın bir işbirliğine girebilecek olan ve Taliban konusunda daha önce Rusya'nın yeterince canını sıkılmış olan Pakistan'ı çevrelemek amacıyla Hindistan ve İran'la da daha yakın ve stratejik iş birliği alanları oluşturabilir. Pakistan'ın terörle savaşında Amerika'nın yanında yer almış olması Taliban'la aralarında kalıcı bir husumet oluşturmayacağını ön görmek güç değil. Nitekim ABD başta olmak üzere koalisyon ülkelerinin diplomatik misyonları ülkeyi tamamen terk ederken Taliban; Rusya, Pakistan ve Çin'in büyükelçiliklerine koruma garantisi vererek çalışmaya devam etmelerini söylemiştir. Her ne kadar Sovyetlerin Afganistan'ı işgalinde karşı karşıya gelmiş olsalar da ve hatta Taliban 1999 yılında Rusya'ya karşı Çeçen mücahitleri desteklemiş olsa da 2017 yılında başlayan temasların sonucunda -ABD bölgeden tamamen çekilmeden sadece bir ay önce- Taliban Rusya'ya ve Rusya'nın bölgedeki müttefiklerine karşı bir tehdit oluşturmayacağını taahhüt etmişti. Taliban'ı halen terör örgütü listesinde bulunduran Rusya'nın Taliban resmi hükümeti kurmadan net açıklamalardan kaçınacağı düşünülmektedir. Taliban, Afganistan'da kendi idealleri doğrultusunda bir yönetim tesis edip bunu sürdürmek istiyorsa öncelikli olarak uluslararası arenada tanınırlığı, kabul görmesi ve ilişki tesis etmesi gerekmektedir. Taliban kendini daha önce terör örgütü olarak tanımlayan ülkelerle hangi dili ve söylemi kullanarak ilişki kuracak, bu çok önemli. Yeni bir dil geliştirmesi gerektiği aşikâr ancak Taliban'ın bunu yapma konusundaki istekliliği ve kapasitesi daha önceki iktidarından kaynaklı kuşkular barındırmaktadır. Taliban kendi kimliğiyle ve mevcut adıyla hükümeti kurmadığı takdirde, pek çok ülkenin yeni kurulacak Afgan hükümetiyle iş birliği ve iletişim kanallarını açık tutmaya devam etmesi olası gözükmektedir.