



Navigating the Aftermath: U.S. Policy in Afghanistan Following Troop Withdrawal

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Abstract: The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in the middle of 2021 has put at stake and turned to shock the world community. The world, which was fighting COVID-19, faced more concerns about the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. It became not only a concern of Middle East countries, but it raised questions in Europe too. While the Middle East countries were anxious about security issues in the region, Europe was anxious about the mass migration of refugees. Russia, the country which is crucially interested in stable peace in the Middle East, and China, which is cooperating with Afghanistan in the economic sector, began negotiations with the Taliban government to stabilize the situation peacefully after the withdrawal of American troops.

The article analyzes the changes in US policy in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of troops in August 2021. The withdrawal of the US military contingent from Afghanistan has changed the balance of power in Central Asia, which, on the one hand, creates new risks to international security, and on the other hand, opens up new opportunities for interested players in the international arena in the region. In the new conditions, the United States is forced to restructure its policy towards Afghanistan and change its security strategy in accordance with the new balance of forces in the region. The findings of the study relate to the actual interests of the United States in the field of security in Afghanistan and in the Central Asian region as a whole.

Keywords: Afghanistan, USA, Taliban, security, Central Asia, geopolitics

One of the most protracted military conflicts in modern history is the Afghan civil war, which commenced in 1978 and underwent several phases. The most recent phase, initiated in 2001, was marked by military operations led by the United States and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), formed under U.S. leadership and supported by the Afghan government, against the Taliban, an Islamist organization. The United States, a pivotal participant in this stage of the Afghan armed conflict, conducted two major operations: "Enduring Freedom" (October 7,

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2001 – December 28, 2014) and "Guardian of Freedom" (January 1, 2015 – August 15, 2021). These operations were counter-terrorism campaigns targeting al-Qaeda¹ and ISIS affiliates in Afghanistan. The final U.S. mission was coordinated with NATO's "Resolute Support" mission (January 1, 2015 – August 31, 2021).

Operation Enduring Freedom was launched in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Between 2003 and the end of 2014, the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF) was under the leadership of NATO forces, acting based on UN Security Council Resolution No. 1386, adopted on December 20, 2001. In July 2011, a decision was made to initiate the gradual withdrawal of coalition troops from Afghanistan. By July 2013, primary responsibilities for ensuring security in Afghanistan had been transferred to local law enforcement agencies, with the international coalition assuming a supporting role.

Starting in 2015, military operations were conducted by U.S. special forces units (as part of Operation Guardian of Freedom) and Afghan security forces, with assistance from advisers from NATO member countries (as part of Operation Resolute Support). The U.S. and NATO's participation in the Afghan conflict concluded on August 31, 2021, coinciding with the withdrawal of alliance troops amid a Taliban² offensive. The end of the United States' longest-running armed conflict and the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan inevitably altered the regional power dynamics, necessitating a reassessment of U.S. policy toward Afghanistan. In this new context, the United States' international security strategy also requires recalibration and modernization.

This study will proceed by analyzing the stages of the Afghan armed conflict from 2001 to 2021, up to the U.S. troop withdrawal on August 31, 2021. It will scrutinize changes in U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and the domain of security in the post-war landscape. The investigation will commence with a concise examination of the United States' geopolitical interests and policies in Afghanistan and Central Asia during the 1990s.

Brief history of 1990–2001

In the 1990s, the United States displayed significant interest in Central Asia, driven by energy concerns and geopolitical rivalry with Russia in the region. The U.S. envisioned the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline, aiming to reduce Russia's dominance in the transit and export of energy resources within the region. However, these ambitions were obstructed by the ongoing civil war in Afghanistan between the Taliban and Mujahideen factions.

In September 1996, when the Taliban captured Kabul, the United States initiated diplomatic engagement with the Taliban. This engagement was justified by strategic considerations, primarily the desire to swiftly attain peace in Afghanistan and contain

¹ Al-Qaeda is recognized as a terrorist organization by the Supreme Court of Russia.

² Taliban is recognized as a terrorist organization by the Supreme Court of Russia.

Iran (Khlopov 2021). In 1997, representatives from the Taliban engaged in discussions with the U.S. State Department, and in 1998, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations visited Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, by 1997, tensions had begun to rise between the Taliban and the United States, ultimately leading to a breakdown in bilateral relations and escalating conflict. The Taliban anticipated formal recognition by the United States as Afghanistan's legitimate authority and non-interference in the nation's internal affairs. Conversely, the United States insisted on a rapid cessation of the civil war, viewing it as the primary impediment to the pipeline project through Afghanistan. A second requirement was an end to discriminatory policies against women and civilians within Afghanistan, driven by influential interest groups in the United States. Lastly, the U.S. demanded the extradition of Osama bin Laden, whom they considered a threat to national security.

Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda, took residence in Afghanistan in 1998 and declared it a "religious duty" for all Muslims to target Americans and their allies. On August 7, 1998, terrorist attacks were perpetrated against U.S. embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for these attacks, which were the most significant acts of terrorism against the United States before September 11, 2001. The U.S. insisted on the Taliban surrendering bin Laden, but this request was disregarded. Consequently, relations between the parties deteriorated sharply, although some level of contact persisted.

Subsequently, the United States imposed sanctions on the Taliban, intensified support for the Northern Alliance, a group opposing the Taliban, and initiated missile strikes against the Taliban. The definitive rupture in relations between the United States and the Taliban occurred following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. On October 7, 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom commenced, marking the beginning of a two-decade-long U.S. military presence in Afghanistan³.

Operation Enduring Freedom (2001–2014)

In the initial phase of the operation, the United States, in conjunction with the United Kingdom, initially confined their actions to missile and aerial strikes targeting Taliban military assets. These strikes were aimed at providing air support to the Northern Alliance's armed groups, which were striving to overthrow the Taliban regime. After a month of sustained airstrikes, the Taliban's positions weakened significantly, culminating in a major offensive operation by the Northern Alliance. Subsequently, the Taliban relinquished control of all major cities except Kandahar. Toward the end of November, the United States deployed a substantial military force, comprising ap-

³ UN Security Council Resolution No. 1386 of December 20, 2001. *Official website of the United Nations*. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/708/57/PDF/N0170857.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 16.08.2023)

proximately 1,000 Marines. In December, the siege of Kandahar concluded, signifying the conclusion of the initial phase of hostilities and the downfall of the Taliban regime.

Following this, the U.S. military redirected their focus toward the mountainous Tora Bora region in southeastern Afghanistan. Intelligence indicated that Osama bin Laden was harbored within an extensive cave complex in this area. After the Northern Alliance, aided by U.S. air support, secured the region, it was discovered that bin Laden had already managed to escape. Nevertheless, the primary objective of ousting the Taliban from power was achieved over the preceding two and a half months. The Taliban had been considerably debilitated and had suffered substantial combat losses. In accordance with a UN Security Council resolution passed on December 20, 2001, a NATO military mission known as ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) was deployed to maintain security in Afghanistan. In 2002, as a result of Operation Anaconda, the Taliban were pushed back into the country's mountainous hinterlands.

While the United States referred to the ongoing military operations as the "war against terror," in official reports and documents, the Taliban movement was not explicitly designated as a terrorist organization. In many instances, the Taliban were referred to as "insurgents." This nomenclature may have been chosen to allow for flexibility and the possibility of future engagement with the movement. The Bonn Conference of 2001 marked the commencement of a new political phase in Afghanistan. During this conference, an interim Government was established, a new Constitution was adopted, and Hamid Karzai assumed the role of Head of State (Omar 2014).

During their two-year presence in Afghanistan, the United States expended over \$25 billion. However, the Taliban's resistance was not fully subdued. During a period of relative tranquility following Operation Anaconda, the Taliban gradually regrouped and exploited the uncontrolled "tribal zone" on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. By 2003, having amassed sufficient forces, the Taliban initiated combat operations in the country's south and escalated terrorist activities in major Afghan urban centers (Nojumi 2003: 517–519). The initiation of the second stage of the armed conflict is characterized as a "guerrilla war," considering the tactics employed by the Taliban during this period. Consequently, NATO opted to augment its military presence, and in October 2003, the UN Security Council extended ISAF's area of responsibility beyond the capital city⁴.

Simultaneously, a new Constitution for Afghanistan was ratified in 2004, and the country witnessed its inaugural presidential elections—a significant milestone in its history. Hamid Karzai emerged as the victor. The nation was thus actively engaged in processes of economic and political reconstruction⁵. Through the Afghan government,

⁴ UN Security Council Resolution No. 1510 of October 13, 2003. *Official website of the United Nations*. URL: [https://undocs.org/Home/Loader?FinalSymbol=m%3DS%2FRES%2F1510\(2003\)&Language=R&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=True](https://undocs.org/Home/Loader?FinalSymbol=m%3DS%2FRES%2F1510(2003)&Language=R&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=True) (accessed 16.08.2023)

⁵ Elliot A. Political Party Development in Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities "Policy Options for State Building in Afghanistan". SAIS Spring, 2009 URL: <http://www.saisjhu.edu/academics/regionalstudies/southasia/pdf/Afghanistan%20Political%20Parties%204ELLIOTpdf> (accessed 16.08.2023)

the United States persistently endeavored to negotiate with the Taliban. However, these efforts proved fruitless as the Taliban insisted on the complete withdrawal of foreign troops and the retention of their weaponry—conditions that the United States found unacceptable.

The covert operations of the Taliban inflicted substantial harm on the American military contingent, resulting in a marked increase in terrorist incidents. The situation was further destabilized by the populace's negative perception of foreign military presence and a lack of confidence in the incumbent Afghan government. Meanwhile, the Berlin Conference convened in March–April 2004 to address concerns related to the burgeoning drug trade in Afghanistan and to chart the nation's continued development (Tutkov 2004).

The year 2005 witnessed a notable upsurge in armed confrontations within Afghanistan. In 2006, ISAF and NATO forces expanded their operational scope across different regions of Afghanistan. Successful operations were executed against the Taliban in the southern part of the country, and in 2007, a major offensive was undertaken by coalition forces in the northern territories. In 2008, the Taliban initiated a counter-offensive along the border with Pakistan, resulting in damage to NATO supply routes. Concurrently, the Taliban's actions retained a predominantly insurgent character.

By 2009, the United States had expended over \$320 billion in its military campaign against the Taliban and had deployed more than 30,000 troops in Afghanistan, with casualties numbering approximately 1,500 soldiers. Against this backdrop, Western public opinion and media outlets grew increasingly critical of the ongoing military engagement. Upon assuming the presidency, Barack Obama announced a reassessment of the regional strategy and a phased increase in troop levels to over 100,000 soldiers. Simultaneously, plans were unveiled to commence the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan by mid-2011 (Gasaniev 2020). The primary divergence in Barack Obama's approach to Afghanistan compared to his predecessor, President George Bush, was the recognition and acceptance of the inability to defeat the Taliban solely through military means.

Consequently, in November 2010, representatives from the United States and Afghanistan convened in Germany, with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton formally declaring in 2011 the United States' readiness to engage in peace negotiations with the Taliban. Regrettably, these talks ultimately collapsed, partly due to the actions of the Afghan government of the time. Consequently, military operations persisted as before, while the Taliban effectively controlled several provinces within the country. The pivotal occurrence in 2011 was the elimination of Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Subsequently, the U.S. President announced intentions to fully transfer security responsibilities in the country to Afghan authorities by 2014 (Masyakina & Slinko 2021).

In 2013, a decision was made to withdraw half of the American troops from Afghanistan by the beginning of 2014. Concurrently, a security agreement was formalized between the United States and Afghanistan, substantiating the presence of U.S.

and NATO forces within the nation until 2016. On December 28, 2014, Operation Enduring Freedom, led by the United States, was officially concluded. Despite the substantial financial resources invested in the operation, it fell short of achieving its primary objectives throughout the military campaign. The Taliban and Al-Qaeda remained active and resilient, maintaining control over certain Afghan provinces. External financial and material support to the Taliban persisted, contributing to continued instability within the country⁶. A positive development, however, was the initiation of a phased transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan governmental authorities and the withdrawal of a significant portion of the foreign military contingent.

Operation Resolute Support (2015–2021)

Following the conclusion of Operation Enduring Freedom, which spanned 13 years, a new mission titled Resolute Support was launched. This operation, undertaken by NATO and its allies, aimed to train and provide assistance to the Afghan government forces. Resolute Support commenced on January 1, 2015, and continued until the final withdrawal of NATO troops on August 31, 2021. Preceding this operation, a bilateral agreement titled "On Cooperation in the Field of Defense and Security" was signed between the United States and Afghanistan, delineating the presence of American troops in the country until 2024. Support for this new operation from the international community was solidified through UN Security Council Resolution No. 2189, passed on December 12, 2014⁷.

The period following the conclusion of armed hostilities in late 2014, up until the withdrawal of foreign troops, witnessed heightened diplomatic endeavors to secure peace in Afghanistan. This shift emerged due to the recognition of the impracticality of resolving the conflict through military means, coupled with mounting global discontent over a protracted military campaign that yielded limited visible results⁸. Despite these dynamics, initial attempts to forge a peaceful dialogue between warring factions in 2015–2016 yielded minimal success. Upon assuming office in 2017, the new U.S. President, Donald Trump, made substantial efforts to exert pressure on the Taliban, albeit without significant success. Consequently, in July 2018, President Trump asserted the necessity of employing all diplomatic, economic, and military means to end the conflict in a manner commensurate with the sacrifices made by the United States during its more than fifteen-year military presence in Afghanistan (Khlopov 2021). This

⁶ Sufizada H. 2020. The Taliban are Megarich – Here's Where They Get the Money They Use to Wage War in Afghanistan. *The Conversation*. December 8. URL: <https://theconversation.com/the-taliban-are-megarich-heres-where-they-get-the-money-they-use-to-wage-war-in-afghanistan-147411> (accessed 18.08.2023)

⁷ UN Security Council Resolution No. 2189 of December 12, 2014. *Official website of the United Nations*. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N14/691/63/PDF/N1469163.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 18.08.2023)

⁸ Clayton T. 2019. Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy. *Congressional Research Service*. Washington. URL: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45818> (accessed 18.08.2023)

decision did not align with the preferences of President Ashraf Ghani, who opposed official negotiations with the Taliban. Consequently, the timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. forces began to directly hinge on the evolving situation within the country.

In an effort to invigorate the peace process, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani initiated a series of peace overtures amid growing weariness among the Afghan populace due to the protracted conflict. These initiatives included the Afghan government's willingness to engage in peace negotiations. In 2018, the American diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad was appointed by President Trump as a special representative for Afghanistan, tasked with advancing negotiations with the Taliban and achieving a peace agreement. In total, nine rounds of negotiations were conducted, during which numerous points of contention between the parties surfaced⁹. While a draft peace agreement was crafted by August 2019, subsequent negotiations were suspended by the United States following a terrorist attack in Kabul.

The negotiation process resumed in December 2019, and on February 29, 2020, in Doha, Qatar, the United States and the Taliban inked the "Agreement on Restoring Peace in Afghanistan," commonly referred to as the "Doha Agreement" (Machitidze 2020). This agreement entailed the complete withdrawal of foreign troops within 14 months, the easing of economic sanctions against the Taliban, the exchange of prisoners, and various other provisions. Although negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government were scheduled to commence in March of the same year, full-fledged intra-Afghan talks were delayed until September due to disputes regarding the prisoner exchange issue.

However, the negotiation process and the signing of the Doha Agreement did not lead to a decrease in military activity; on the contrary, they triggered a new round of escalation. In the months following the treaty's signing, the number of Taliban attacks surged by 70%. Both the Taliban and government forces initiated major offensive operations, and the negotiation process failed to yield significant results or halt armed clashes. On April 14, 2021, the new U.S. President, Joe Biden, announced the commencement of the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, starting from May 1 (Yashlavsky 2021). President Biden contended that the United States had fulfilled its objectives, and support for the intra-Afghan negotiation process would continue.

As the withdrawal of American troops began on May 1, the Taliban launched a significant offensive against the Afghan government, effectively terminating the negotiation process. The Taliban leadership seized this opportunity to regain control of the country. The offensive progressed swiftly, culminating in the Taliban's occupation of Kabul on August 15. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani resigned and left the country.

⁹ Nazar Z. 2019. U.S. Envoy Declares "A Lot of Progress" In Taliban Peace Talks. Radio Free Europe. *Afghan Online Press*. 08.07. URL: <http://www.aopnews.com/taliban/u-s-envoy-declares-a-lot-of-progress-in-taliban-peace-talks/> (accessed 18.08.2023)

The remnants of government forces began to concentrate in the remaining areas under their control, organizing resistance against the Taliban. During the night of August 30 to 31, the last American military personnel left Afghanistan, marking the conclusion of Operation Resolute Support and the twenty-year presence of foreign troops in the country.

Post-war US Policy in Afghanistan

The successful offensive and the rapid withdrawal of American troops allowed the Taliban to reassert power in Afghanistan, accompanied by the seizure of a substantial cache of weapons left behind by American forces. According to experts, the operation to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan was deemed a failure, with the overall outcome of the twenty-year foreign troop presence in the country failing to yield results in terms of both peaceful conflict resolution and international security. The Inspector General of the US Government for Reconstruction in Afghanistan attributed some of the operation's shortcomings to the excessive "belief at the time that the US could transform a country in ruins in 2001 into one with a robust central government" (Amini 2021).

The United States' strategy did not account for the social nuances of Afghan society, longstanding ethnic conflicts, and territorial disputes. Moreover, the effectiveness of Afghanistan's official authorities was questionable, as they lacked the necessary influence over individual tribal factions and field commanders. Many actors operated independently without coordination with the central government in Kabul. Furthermore, the Afghan government itself resulted from a fragile balance of interests among major ethnic groups: the president garnered support mainly from Pashtun-majority regions, while the prime minister received backing from ethnic minorities (Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and others) (Chernavin and Feruz 2021). High levels of corruption within the government exacerbated these challenges.

Currently, the new Taliban regime is undergoing formalization and consolidation. New political institutions are being established, and the legal system is undergoing changes. However, the Taliban has yet to achieve complete control over provinces such as Panjsher, Baghlan, Takhar, and Badakhshan, where the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan continues to resist the Taliban regime.

The new Taliban regime differs significantly from the one overthrown with the assistance of the United States in the 1990s. It exhibits greater control over the country's territory, improved logistical capabilities, a relatively intact infrastructure, painstakingly rebuilt by the United States over the past two decades, and, most notably, a desire to attain international recognition and legitimacy in the eyes of the global community. The new Taliban regime has conveyed its commitment to values such as freedom, human rights, equality, the elimination of discrimination, the protection of women's rights, and the fight against drug trafficking, although instances of the new authorities deviating from these promises have been observed, much like during the previous

Taliban regime. The United States, along with other nations, must take into account this new power dynamic in Afghanistan, which will undoubtedly influence their policies toward the nation.

As of the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, Afghanistan remains one of the most unstable countries globally and continues to be a paramount foreign policy concern for the United States. Numerous think tanks believe that U.S. policy in Afghanistan following the troop withdrawal is characterized by a desire to remain engaged in the country and support the Afghan people while refraining from legitimizing the Taliban regime¹⁰.

One of the primary focal points of U.S. policy in Afghanistan post-troop withdrawal is the humanitarian sphere. The United States aims to avert a potential humanitarian catastrophe and assist Afghan citizens in meeting their essential needs, including food and healthcare. International humanitarian aid, which constituted a significant portion of Afghanistan's economy, is now largely unavailable to the country. The United States is committed to ensuring Afghanistan's food security, and by mid-January 2022, it had already dispatched humanitarian aid worth more than \$780 million to Afghanistan and Afghan refugees¹¹. However, the aid provided thus far is insufficient to address the humanitarian challenges and stabilize the Afghan economy. Consequently, the United States is collaborating closely with the United Nations and other organizations to establish an effective mechanism for providing humanitarian assistance to the Afghan populace.

Another critical area of U.S. interest in Afghanistan pertains to human rights, particularly women's rights. Upon assuming power, the Taliban pledged to respect women's rights and allow their participation in public life. However, within a few months of Taliban rule, it became evident that the new government was backtracking on its initial promises. Women were gradually excluded from public life, including education, and reports of abductions and killings of women protesting against the Taliban's policies began to emerge. Furthermore, the Taliban reneged on their promise to grant amnesty to former government officials. Reports of former officials, police officers, human rights advocates, civil society leaders, and journalists being killed by the Taliban have become distressingly common.

To maintain its policy of non-recognition of the Taliban government, the United States has declined to unfreeze the Afghan government's accounts and the foreign exchange reserves of the Central Bank of Afghanistan. Estimates of the amount frozen vary from \$7 to \$9 billion. Taliban Foreign Minister A.H. Muttaki has requested that the United States unfreeze these accounts, as the freeze exacerbates the country's economic crisis, adversely affecting trade, business, and the delivery

¹⁰ Curtis L. Dealing with a Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan. *Center for a New American Security (CNAS)*. URL: <https://www.cnas.org/press/press-release/new-report-addresses-dealing-with-a-taliban-controlled-afghanistan> (accessed 18.08.2023).

¹¹ The United States Will Provide More Than \$300 Million in Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan. *Interfax*. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/814791> (accessed 18.08.2023).

of humanitarian aid¹². Nevertheless, the United States does not view the frozen reserves as the cause of the crisis and maintains its policy of non-recognition of the Taliban regime. The United States aims to prevent any substantial financial resources from falling into the hands of the Taliban.

One of the reasons for refusing to grant the Taliban access to Afghanistan's international accounts is the presence of individuals in the Taliban government who are subject to sanctions by the UN Security Council. This linkage underscores the denial of access to Afghan reserves with increasing risks and threats to U.S. national security while continuing negotiations with the Taliban. While transferring Afghan reserves to the new regime might contribute to economic stabilization, it also presents the risk that these funds could be used to sustain the Taliban regime. Given the Taliban's past disregard for international law, there are no guarantees that unblocking Afghan assets will not pose a threat to the national security of the United States and other countries.

Addressing the continued presence of internationally recognized terrorists within the Taliban government, it is imperative to acknowledge the potential coordination between select Taliban members and other terrorist organizations, notably Al-Qaeda, as well as the prospect of attracting militants from various nations to Afghanistan through their influence. Particularly noteworthy in this context is the Haqqani family, whose members occupy key positions in the Taliban government and have been reported by the United Nations to be involved in maintaining the Taliban's connections with other terrorist groups (Shashok 2021). The persistent ties between the Taliban government and other terrorist entities, particularly Al-Qaeda, render the lifting of sanctions against Taliban government members and any moves towards recognizing Afghanistan's new government implausible.

According to the United States, the Taliban currently exhibits no intent to sever its ties with other terrorist groups. Consequently, Afghanistan remains a country characterized by a significant terrorist threat and serves as a potential sanctuary for terrorists from various nations. The withdrawal of troops and the absence of allies within Afghanistan do not curtail the United States' capacity to conduct intelligence operations in the country, yet it also remains insufficient to combat Al-Qaeda effectively. While the United States could potentially collaborate with the Taliban in countering ISIS, the Taliban's ties to Al-Qaeda and its rejection of U.S. assistance, coupled with the U.S.'s reluctance to legitimize the Taliban regime, render this collaboration unfeasible (Yakovlev & Malik 2022). Informally, the United States expresses support for the Taliban's efforts against ISIS.

American authorities acknowledge the necessity of having partners in Afghanistan to counteract the terrorist threat. Even before the troop withdrawal, President Biden emphasized the "metastases" that Al-Qaeda had spread throughout Afghani-

¹² Savage C. 2022. Spurning Demand by the Taliban, Biden Moves to Split \$7 Billion in Frozen Afghan Funds. *The New York Times*. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/11/us/politics/taliban-afghanistan-911-families-frozenfunds.html?referringSource=articleShare> (accessed 18.08.2023)

stan. The Taliban's assumption of power potentially provides Al-Qaeda with a secure base for planning attacks against the United States. Against the backdrop of diminishing operational opportunities within Afghanistan itself, U.S. interest in Central Asian states has seen a sharp increase, as these nations are equally invested in mitigating the terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan and may emerge as vital U.S. partners in this regard. Nevertheless, geopolitical differences impede constructive anti-terrorism cooperation between the United States and other major international actors in the region, such as Russia, China, and Iran, despite these countries sharing a strong interest in curtailing the proliferation of terrorist influence and addressing humanitarian concerns in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has served as a longstanding U.S. intelligence partner in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan pursues its own objectives in Afghanistan and maintains certain contacts with the Taliban, even engaging with them. This may compromise the objectivity of the intelligence data obtained, prompting the United States to reduce its reliance on Pakistan in this context. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are emerging as potential new partners for the United States in the fight against terrorism in the region. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan actively provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, while Tajikistan has offered sanctuary to the forces of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan on its territory, which intends to persist in resisting the Taliban (Ivanova 2021). Each of these countries perceives distinct security risks stemming from developments in Afghanistan, forming the basis upon which the United States aims to foster cooperation with Central Asian nations, primarily in the realm of intelligence sharing.

Concurrently, as part of its ongoing Afghan policy framework, the United States continues to maintain communication channels with the Taliban, particularly concerning counter-terrorism initiatives. President Biden does not preclude the potential recognition of the Taliban government in the future; however, he underscored that such recognition remains a distant prospect¹³. The new Afghan authorities must, first and foremost, address a plethora of issues that significantly impact U.S. interests and national security. These include human rights matters (women's rights, minority rights, access to education, etc.); the establishment of an inclusive and democratic government free from individuals involved in terrorist activities; the commencement of genuine counter-terrorism efforts; and the severance of ties between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

Conclusion

Based on the study, several conclusions can be drawn regarding U.S. policy in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of troops.

¹³ Biden Said that US Recognition of Taliban Power in Afghanistan is Still Very Far away. TASS. URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/12316567> (accessed 18.08.2023)

The process of political settlement of the Afghan conflict, with the participation of the United States, began during the Taliban's initial tenure in power but was interrupted due to the Taliban's refusal to extradite bin Laden. During the military campaign, which commenced in 2001, the United States focused on establishing a democratic government in Afghanistan and stabilizing the country economically. By 2018, the imperative for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and the necessity to withdraw American troops led to negotiations with the Taliban. However, the resulting agreement did not lead to a conflict resolution as anticipated by the United States and the Afghan authorities of that time. In 2021, the Taliban rapidly seized power, culminating in the swift withdrawal of foreign troops remaining in Afghanistan.

U.S. policy in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of troops is centered on efforts to influence the situation within the country and the broader region, all while refraining from officially recognizing the Taliban government. This approach is manifested, firstly, in the provision of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people through various organizations and companies. Currently, the United States has allocated more humanitarian aid than any other nation (\$1.1 billion)¹⁴. The United States is keen on averting a humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan, as it could further destabilize both the country and Central Asia as a whole.

One of the mechanisms employed to exert influence on Afghanistan involves freezing accounts and foreign exchange reserves, a tactic also used in U.S. dealings with other nations. This measure aims to curtail the financial resources available to the Taliban. The rationale behind this action is to prevent the Taliban government from accessing substantial funds. As highlighted by Laurel Miller, following the Taliban's takeover, banks faced a cash shortage, and even Afghan citizens with savings found themselves unable to access their funds, as \$9.5 billion in Afghan assets had been frozen by global powers striving to keep financial resources away from the Taliban government¹⁵. This move seeks to thwart any potential terrorist efforts to receive government support under the Taliban. Additionally, it is imperative that the Taliban distance itself from Al-Qaeda, a paramount goal of the entire American military campaign in Afghanistan. This requirement extends to any form of support for other terrorist groups within Afghanistan.

At a juncture where the United States has limited means to influence the situation in Afghanistan, except through economic levers, American policy is shifting its focus towards collaborating with other interested countries in the region. Besides Pakistan, potential partners in this endeavor encompass Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Collabora-

¹⁴ This additional funding brings U.S. support for Afghanistan to more than \$1.1 billion in humanitarian assistance since August 2021, including nearly \$812 million from USAID and nearly \$320 million from the State Department. *USAID*. URL: <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/sep-23-2022-united-states-provided-more-11-billion-humanitarian-assistance-afghanistan> (accessed 18.08.2023)

¹⁵ Miller L. 2021. Engaging with Afghanistan to Prevent a Humanitarian Disaster. *Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft*. URL: <https://quincyinst.org/event/engaging-with-afghanistan-to-prevent-a-humanitarian-disaster/> (accessed 18.08.2023)

tion with these nations aims to address humanitarian concerns, gather intelligence, and support the U.S. Federal Tax Service, which may counter the Taliban's control in the region. The United States should also remain mindful of the interests of other major regional powers (Russia, China, Iran), which may seek to pursue their own agendas in Afghanistan, potentially conflicting with U.S. interests.

President Biden acknowledges the possibility of recognizing the Taliban government. However, this is contingent on the new Afghan authorities meeting certain conditions that largely align with U.S. expectations for the Taliban during their initial rule in the 1990s. These conditions encompass safeguarding human rights, excluding individuals believed to be involved in terrorist activities from the government, and severing ties with Al-Qaeda. Fulfilling these criteria would diminish the threat to U.S. national security posed by the Taliban. Consequently, it could pave the way for comprehensive dialogue, encompassing not only the release of Afghanistan's international assets but also the full recognition of the Taliban government.

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Двадцатилетнее военное стратегическое присутствие США в Афганистане закончилось тем, что поддерживаемому Соединёнными Штатами афганскому правительству не удалось удержать власть в стране, а афганским силам безопасности – противостоять набирающим силу боевым подразделениям движения «Талибан». После захвата «Талибаном»

власти в стране и одновременного вывода всех иностранных войск мир столкнулся с множеством неопределённостей во внутренней и внешней политике возглавляемого талибами Афганистана. Ряд вопросов безопасности с новыми властями Афганистана начал обсуждать Китай, который активизировал инвестирование промышленности Афганистана в рамках проекта «Пояс и Путь». Россия в настоящее время не проявляет сильной обеспокоенности по поводу ситуации в Афганистане. К тому же многолетний опыт пребывания в этой стране советских войск помог России найти «точки соприкосновения» с новым правительством, возглавляемым талибами. В целом в условиях, когда основной фокус внимания мирового сообщества, включая США и европейские страны, переключился на события, происходящие на Украине, значительный интерес к взаимодействию с Афганистаном сохраняется в основном только у его стран-соседей, готовых развивать дипломатические отношения с государством, возглавляемым «Талибаном». Вывод американских и других иностранных войск из Афганистана ознаменовал собой завершение миссии по противостоянию транснациональному терроризму в Афганистане. Этот период открывает огромные перспективы странам региона во внешней политике с Афганистаном и в экономическом взаимодействии со страной. Талибы заинтересованы в сотрудничестве с иностранными компаниями и для этого готовы сохранять мир и стабильность в стране, что подтверждается встречами с главами соседних государств. Однако с учётом динамично меняющейся ситуации в регионе пока сложно делать какие-либо долгосрочные прогнозы по Афганистану. Следует внимательно отслеживать соответствующие значимые изменения как в политике руководимого талибами Афганистана, так и в политике США в этой стране.

В статье проанализированы изменения курса США в отношении Афганистана после вывода войск в августе 2021 г. Вывод военного контингента США из Афганистана изменил баланс сил в Центральной Азии, что, с одной стороны, создаёт новые риски международной безопасности, а с другой стороны, открывает новые возможности для заинтересованных игроков на международной арене в регионе. В новых условиях США вынуждены перестраивать свою политику в отношении Афганистана и менять свою стратегию безопасности в соответствии с новым соотношением сил в регионе. В этой связи исследованы интересы США в сфере безопасности в Афганистане и в Центральноазиатском регионе в целом.

Ключевые слова: Афганистан, США, талибы, безопасность, Центральная Азия, геополитика

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