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# U.S. COUNTERINSURGENCY EFFORTS AGAINST THE TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN: POLITICAL ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT

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## **Faiz Muhammad Zaland<sup>1</sup>**

Lecturer Kabul University, Faculty of Public Administration and Policy (Kabul, Afghanistan), PhD student, Department of political science and political technologies, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

## **Bakyt Rakhimbekova<sup>2</sup>**

Candidate of historical science, Department of Political Science and Political Technologies, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

**Abstract.** The article analyzes the reasons and consequences of the United States' efforts to combat the insurgents of the Taliban movement. The authors rely on David Galula's interventionist theory of "counterinsurgency warfare" and put forward a hypothesis that ignoring the local government – as one of the most important prerequisites for success in the fight against terrorist groups in Afghanistan – led to the resurgence of the Taliban rebellion and prolonged the Afghan conflict.

**Keywords:** *counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, indigenous government, Taliban, the United States, Afghanistan.*

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<sup>1</sup> zalandj@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> rahimbekovabakyt@gmail.com

## АҚШ-ТЫҢ АУҒАНСТАНДАҒЫ «ТАЛИБАН» ҚОЗҒАЛЫСЫНЫҢ КӨТЕРІЛІСШІЛЕРГЕ ҚАРСЫ ӘРЕКЕТТЕРІ: САЯСИ ТАЛДАУ ЖӘНЕ БАҒАЛАУ

Фаиз Мұхаммед Заланд, Бақыт Рахымбекова

**Андатпа.** Мақалада АҚШ-тың «Талибан» көтерілісшілерімен күресу әрекеттерінің себептері мен салдары талданады. Авторлар Д.Галуланың "көтерілісшілерге қарсы күрес" туралы интервенциялық теориясына сүйене отырып, Ауғанстандағы террористік топтармен күресте жеңіске жетудің маңызды алғышарттарының бірі ретінде танитын үкіметті елемеу гипотезасына сүйену «Талибан» көтерілісінің қайта басталуына және Ауған қақтығысының ұзаққа созылуына алып келді деп болжайды.

**Түйін сөздер:** көтерілісшілерге қарсы күрес, терроризмге қарсы іс-қимыл, жергілікті үкімет, «Талибан», АҚШ, Ауғанстан.

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## УСИЛИЯ США ПО БОРЬБЕ С ПОВСТАНЦАМИ ДВИЖЕНИЯ «ТАЛИБАН» В АФГАНИСТАНЕ: ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ И ОЦЕНКА

Фаиз Мухаммад Заланд, Бакыт Рахимбекова

**Аннотация.** В статье анализируются причины и последствия усилий США по борьбе с повстанцами движения «Талибан». Авторы опираются на интервенционистскую теорию Д. Галулы о “борьбе с повстанцами” и выдвигают гипотезу о том, что игнорирование местного правительства – как одного из наиболее важных предварительных условий победы в борьбе с террористическими группировками в Афганистане – привело к возобновлению мятежа талибов и затягиванию афганского конфликта.

**Ключевые слова:** борьба с повстанцами, контртерроризм, местное правительство, «Талибан», мятеж, США, Афганистан.

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### Introduction

After the United States invasion on 07th October 2011 in Afghanistan, counterinsurgency efforts were the very essential steps to defeat Taliban's insurgency and to strengthen the post-conflict reconstruction, state-building and establishing a democratic government in Afghanistan. As discussed in detail below, the United States fought its history's longest war to defeat the Taliban insurgency, one strategy for doing so involved winning the “hearts and minds” of Afghans. However, the U.S. it failed in its stated objectives.

The main question of this research paper is therefore: Why U.S. Counterinsurgency efforts failed in Afghanistan? To respond to this question; we have focused on the explaining “counterinsurgency theory” in the context of Afghanistan. The underlying assumption of the counterinsurgency literature is that counterinsurgency can be won through a package of military, political and social actions under the strong control of a single authority.

Besides assessing the above-stated hypotheses, the present research studies counterinsurgency, counterterrorism campaigns in Afghanistan mainly from

the perspective of the United States' dual strategy approach to fighting the insurgency in Afghanistan (Counterinsurgency vs. Counter Terrorism) at the national level. Based on the literature review, it also attempts to identify the role of the lack of legitimacy of the Afghan government at the sub-national administration level played in allowing the Taliban's insurgency to take momentum after 2005. The following are some of the critical questions which this research aims to undertake for the discussion.

1. How far were the United States military capabilities well aimed in Afghanistan to defeat the insurgency in the country?

2. How did corruption, leadership incompetency and lack of military training in the ANDSF assist Taliban to win their insurgency war in past two decades?

3. What role Pakistan played in the failure of the United States' counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan?

Based on the theoretical foundation for the existing classical counterinsurgency efforts around the world; what should change, and adjustments should be considered in the future to win wars against popular insurgencies around the globe.

The wider focus of this study is on the Taliban resurgence and the United States counterinsurgency campaign the latter of which ultimately failed after 20 years of war. Owing to the time and scope of this research, the specific focus is on the counterinsurgency theory and its application in Afghanistan but in general; it illustrates that what went wrong in the United States' efforts in peace building and stabilization of Afghanistan in past two decades.

### **Research objectives**

This research has been designed, as

the title indicates, to examine what has happened on the ground in Afghanistan in past two decades, as it was termed a counterinsurgency campaign by the United States. Its primary objective is to better understand the failure of the United States external state and peace building efforts in Afghanistan. In doing so, it examines the nature of counterinsurgency efforts, along with their challenges and mechanisms at the national level. This analysis then provides the basis for a discussion of how the efforts went wrong.

### **Research methodology**

The qualitative research methodology makes the foundation of this research. The data used in this study comprised secondary academic sources and materials, as well as the one the article's author, Faiz Zaland Mukhammad field research in Afghanistan. He was working in Southeast region, attending many conferences, and meeting many of the state elites combining his experience of eight years with international aid agencies which supported local governance and community development. The secondary source materials used in this study includes a wide range of academic books, journals, research publications and papers, survey materials, the Afghan government, and international donor organization's policy papers, and finally investigative reports and articles from credentialed Afghan and international media outlets.

To elaborate on the failure of the United States counterinsurgency campaign, it is important to understand the essence of this theory and practice. David Galula's theory of "counterinsurgency" is not primarily military, but a mixture of military, political and social actions under the resilient control of a single authority. This observation leads us to one of the critical hypotheses of this research which is that

by ignoring Indigenous government— as one the most significant precondition for winning counterinsurgency – resulted in the return of the Taliban insurgency and prolongation of the Afghan conflict. Based on the counterinsurgency interventionist theory, this paper briefly analyses the cause and consequences of the U.S. counterinsurgency efforts and its peace and state-building failure in Afghanistan.

## Discuss

### What is counterinsurgency?

A well-known counterinsurgency theorist David Galula [1] proposes four "laws" for successful counterinsurgency campaign:

- It is must to win the support of the people; the main aim of counterinsurgency is to win public support to root out all the insurgents and stop further recruitment, rather than conquering the territory.

- Such support is most readily obtained from an active minority. Those willing to actively support a counterinsurgency operation should be supported in their efforts to rally the neutral majority and neutralize the hostile minority.

- It is imperative to consider that public support is conditional. What you do matters, and support can be lost if your actions are unfavorable to the population.

- The fourth and final law of counterinsurgency regards the "intensity of effort and massiveness of means." Counterinsurgency is comprehensive strategy which requires a large focus of efforts, resources, and personnel; it is unlikely that it can be pursued effectively everywhere at once. Rather, action should be taken in select areas, and resources moved as needed.

Counterinsurgency encompasses the attempts governments make to reinstate peace on the ground. The aim is to curtail

civilian deaths while strengthening the influence of governments in the country. Therefore, no singular strategy exists-counterinsurgent forces combine psychological, military, economic and political techniques to defeat the insurgency and win the "hearts and minds" of people.

From the very beginning, the term "counterinsurgency" was conflated with counterterrorism in Afghanistan's invasion by U.S. forces. When the Taliban insurgency was launched in spring 2002, U.S. forces were still conducting counterterrorism attacks all over the country, chasing Taliban affiliates and Al Qaeda members, but after the Obama Surge announced in late 2009, the term counterinsurgency become the favored term for American Generals in their war against Taliban in Afghanistan.

The Taliban insurgency was initiated in the southern provinces like Helmand and Kandahar; they started operating in small squad-size units; [2] while they launched larger attacks at the very beginning of 2005, which provided them a momentum almost in all Southern, Southeastern provinces. On the contrary, in 2006, the US secretary of defense Robert Gates asserted that the NATO/ISAF would not conduct long-term counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan. [3]

At the very beginning of the invasion in Afghanistan, US military leadership chose a clearly enemy-centric strategy to combating Al-Qaeda and Taliban to achieve their objectives in Afghanistan which was later modified by surge as state to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat" Al-Qaeda rather than Taliban.[4]

In an insurgency, insurgents cannot operate without the support of the local population and external support, violence against noncombatant civilians by security forces, whether intentional or accidental is

almost always entirely counterproductive to provide a more support to the insurgency. [5]

Therefore, counterinsurgency is defined by David Galula as “those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency.” [1, p.55] While Seth G. Jones defines counterinsurgency as a destroying insurgent force and their political organization in each geography over the long run.

For a long time in Afghanistan, U.S. forces only focused on the direct approach of their counterinsurgency strategy in which they chased their enemy, and eliminate them, while after a decade of a failed counterterrorism and direct counter insurgency strategy, US government launched an indirect counterinsurgency approach to tackle the Taliban insurgency problem of Afghanistan.

Indeed, the Taliban’s insurgency was a typical case of the type defined by Fearon and Laitin [6] as a technology of a military conflict characterized by small, lightly armed groups practicing guerrilla warfare from their rural bases. While Counterinsurgency operations are generally complex, demanding, and expensive; therefore, in the absence of sufficient military, economic and political resource to establish security, it seems difficult to achieve the objective of “clear, hold and expand”. [2, p.77]. Roger Trinquier [7] rightly argues that winning counterinsurgency campaigns requires a package of actions – political, economic, psychological, military – that aims at the insurgents to be defeated and replaced with a legitimate government.

David Kilcullen [8] writes illustrates the differences between the classic and modern counterinsurgency approaches, as differentiated in the table below:

| Classical Counterinsurgency  | Modern Counter insurgency   |
|--|---|
| National approach  | International approach  |
| Contained to the border of the state                                     | Spilling over to the neighboring countries                                  |
| Training Local Police  | Evolving counterinsurgency strategy is required                             |
| Improving Local Governance   | Building legitimate civil governance  |
| Denying the insurgency and external support                              | Separating the insurgents from its support base                             |
| Denying outside sanctuary to the insurgents                              | Continuous detect and defuse is required (domestically and internationally) |
| Supporting Local Administration to take lead in defeating the insurgency | International Community Cooperation   |

**Table 1.** Differences between the classic and modern counterinsurgency approaches

The indirect counterinsurgency approach was aimed to win the “hearts and minds” on the ground which was focused more on a population-centric strategy. [9]

U.S. forces established Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) within

their military bases to work with local administration on the provision of the basic assessed projects like healthy drinking water, school buildings, health clinics etc. [10] PRTs were small, joint civilian-military organizations [11] while



PRTs were working in some cases as a parallel local administration [12] which were delegitimizing the Afghan Local Governor's presence in the province or district as they were not able to provide such basic public services. When David Petraeus was appointed as a commander in general in Afghanistan in July, 2010, he reassured the counterinsurgency strategy to work by affirming around denying the insurgency its sanctuary within the population and started training Afghan Police and Army to hold the territory so the insurgents Taliban do not return, while building local infrastructure, promoting good governance by supporting the local administration to return to area and trying to eliminate the political corruption.[13]

Counterinsurgency requires both conventional war capabilities and the ability to shape the Indigenous governments capability not only to run the country but also to fight the insurgency domestically. Essentially, the United States had both capabilities, the largest army in the world to fight its conventional wars anywhere in the world but how successful is this army in combating the insurgency was tested in Afghanistan where it failed in building the local capabilities. [2] Indeed, counterinsurgency not only enhances the capability of conventional war but also the capability to form the capacity of the Indigenous government and its security forces.

Thus, there are few significant issues in conducting counterinsurgency operations which must be prevented or at least minimized to achieve the targeted goals; these issues are very succinctly articulated by David Kilcullen as follows:

-counterinsurgent efforts usually attempt to enforce Western attitudes and values. therefore, ignoring the importance of cultural relativism on the ground, counterinsurgents forces lose the combat

of winning "hearts and minds" on the ground.

- counterinsurgency is costly in terms of both human life and resources. To kill insurgents, civilian lives are usually risked, on the other hand, if protecting civilians then more counterinsurgent casualties. Insurgents are often better off with their strategy of being decentralized and spread out over large areas, meaning they have the advantage of "hit and run" attacks.

- counterinsurgency is often ineffective to achieve the stated goal of bringing stability and support for the Indigenous government. The solution for unrest is usually political changes, not military intervention.

- counterinsurgency often lacks a clear end goal, or objectives may differ. The concepts of 'peace' and 'stability' may vary to the external counterinsurgent forces and Indigenous government.[7]

Therefore, to conduct and win a counterinsurgency strategy; it is significant to have a through description of the insurgency, the ground realities and gaining a popular support for achieving the defined objectives.

### **The Principals of Counterinsurgency**

As stated by Kilcullen, an insurgency is a structured, prolonged politico-military struggle organized to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power or other political authority while increasing insurgent control on the ground. Kilcullen adds that U.S. military field manual defines counterinsurgency as the 'military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency. Counterinsurgency as defined above is based on key principals guiding an efficient strategy to eradicate the insurgency whilst

protecting the local population, promoting good governance, eliminating enemy safe sanctuaries, and training the locals to take the fight to the very borders of a nation-state.[9] If we are still holding a classical approach to combat the insurgency, then we should limit our counterinsurgency doctrine to the borders of our country but if we believe in the modern approach to eliminate the insurgency then we require international communities support to fight the insurgency in its cross borders' sanctuaries.[14]

D.Galula states that the population represents the new ground for winning or losing the war against insurgency. If the insurgents manage to dissociate the population from the counterinsurgent forces or Indigenous government, they will win the war; thus, the battle for the population is a major characteristic of the revolutionary war. [1, p.55]

Counterinsurgency is mainly focused to “hold, keep and transfer” the ground and population from insurgent groups to transfer it to the local government; insurgent groups are using various tactics like yielding the population center against the indigenous government, mainly operating from rural areas, distributing propaganda to the local population and oppositions forces, threatening and intimidating the local population and conducting armed “hit and run” attacks on the indigenous government infrastructure and employees. Examples of armed attacks by any insurgency includes ambushes and raids using small arms and grenades; shelling using 107-mm and explosive devices (IEDs) [2] In reality, counterinsurgency operations are somehow of a political nature; therefore, they must always be supported with domestic, regional and global political decisions to be successful in a concerning country; otherwise, it will be much more

difficult to achieve the targeted results. [1, p.67] Therefore, the first principal is to draw a long-term political strategy which should be focused in creating a viable, sustainable stability through building or supporting local administration's effectiveness and legitimacy while marginalizing the insurgents from its local population base should be the priority to be considered to win the counterinsurgency campaign. In addition, an integrated civilian-military efforts, a genuine partnership with the indigenous government, population-centric operations, supporting the key personnel on the ground, building effective and legitimate local security forces to lead the counterinsurgency programs, and a region-wide approach to disrupt the safe havens of the insurgents across the border should be considered the far most significant principals of winning any counterinsurgency operations. [15]

During two decades of conflict in Afghanistan, U.S. and allied forces allegedly committed numerous violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) including (sometimes apparently intentional targeting of civilian and non-military targets and torture of prisoners. For example, April 05th 2010, the whistleblower organization Wikileaks released a leaked video of U.S. military, where two U.S. Apache helicopters shooting casually a group of men; several weeks later; few more reports were leaked by WikiLeaks; showing more that civilians were dying in U.S. detention, in September 2009, German – run provincial reconstruction team ordered U.S. air strikes on two fuel tankers; killing dozens of civilians; on August 16th 2007; angry Polish troops fired heavy machine gun and mortar into a small village, a wedding celebration became a horror scene, killing four women, a man and a baby; in fact, the biggest news in the leaked documents

were a large scale and previously known program of “kill-capture” operations against Taliban, using bombs, drones and night raids. [16] By consequence, the war to win the “heart and mind” of Afghan people was lost due to the absence of a government people could trust and the presence of international forces they feared.

A well-known Kazakhstani expert, the author of a fundamental study on the history and politics of Afghanistan, Sultan Akimbekov, rightly notes the existence of problems associated with the American presence, primarily with the inability to ensure the stable functioning of state institutions and, of course, security problems inside the country.[17]

### Counterinsurgency vs Counterterrorism in Afghanistan

Taliban resurgence took momentum by the summer of 2003; where every day one or two attacks were conducted by Taliban; August of the same year proved to be the deadliest up to that point with more than 220 soldiers and civilians killed all over the country.[18] As 1994, the rise of the Taliban depended on Pakistani support but also on the failure of the mujahidin groups to establish a stable government [19]; indeed, once more the history repeated itself in Afghanistan with a minor change this time; instead of the failure of mujahidin’s failed state formation, it was replaced with an ultimately unsuccessful attempt at democratization backed by the United States.

Jason Rineheart rightly explains the differences between counterinsurgency and counter terrorism which are illustrated below in the table:

| Counterinsurgency  | Counterterrorism  |
|--|---|
| Sole military solution is not possible                             | Complexed strategy  |
| Dual military – Political Solution                                 | Lethal form of unconventional warfare                                     |
| Population centric, separating insurgency from their support base. | Insurgent based, eliminating them everywhere.                             |
| Promoting local governance   | -   |
| Eliminating sanctuaries  | Eliminating sanctuaries and alienating insurgents from their support base |
| Training locals to fight the insurgency                            | -   |
| Confined to the borders of the country                             | Complexed strategy  |

**Table 2.** Differences between the counterinsurgency and counterterrorism

In the summer of 2004, Lt. Gen. David Barno, the new commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, launched new counterinsurgency tactics involving small bands of U.S. forces living in villages to win “hearts and minds” and collect better intelligence from the ground. [18] Absolutely, in the case of Afghanistan’s counterinsurgency operations, that the United States was most likely to be an

external actor – an intervening third party – in a counterinsurgency campaign conducted in a foreign country as stated in the U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide [15] Unfortunately, after the United States invasion in Iraq, Afghanistan became “the other war” under the Bush Administration where resources were starved, attention was distracted, and these facts also assisted to the beginning



of the failure of the counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan. [20]

The overall goal of a counterinsurgency campaign is to achieve control by

“building popular public support for an Indigenous government while delegitimizing and marginalizing the insurgents on the ground” as stated by the government of the United States. [21] Up until late 2006; the United States led all counterinsurgency campaigns where after, the command and control shifted to NATO.[2] Foreign forces are effective only when the indigenous forces lead the counterinsurgency operations; whenever The United States forces acted unilaterally; they posed stark civilian casualties and undermined the legitimacy of Afghan government.

Ahmad Rashid [18] indicates that the United States remained complacent about the Taliban as long as Pakistan continued to appear to chase al Qaeda; he reports that a senior CIA official told him that the Taliban were always considered a lower priority by the United States. While, in general, counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan were aimed to “clear, hold and expand” [2] which were ink spotted in contested parts of south and east of Afghanistan.

In 2010, when General David Petraeus took over McChrystal, the rules of engagement in Afghanistan shifted from counterinsurgency back to counterterrorism; where night raids, aerial bombardment, and drones were prioritized to fight the Taliban insurgency throughout the country.[22] Therefore, such duplicity in reversing the strategies to fight the insurgency in Afghanistan, has caused lack of coordination with the indigenous government, lack of cohesion with the regional countries to combat the terrorists hide-outs in Afghanistan and outside of Afghanistan has lead the whole

strategy of fighting Afghan insurgency to a failure.

### **Why U.S. counterinsurgency efforts failed in Afghanistan?**

The United States counterinsurgency strategy faced several challenges in Afghanistan; in spite of not having a strong, accountable indigenous government with incompetent police and military forces which crippled because of its vast corruption and counterfeit leadership; it faced a geographical (mountainous terrain) problem, ethnic division, tribalism, religious fissures and drastic economic conditions which all motivates insurgency in a weak state [5] like in Afghanistan have all caused it much difficult for U.S. forces to win its counterinsurgency struggle against Taliban’s insurgency during past two decades. Knowing better Afghanistan, Barnett Rubin, the academic expert rightly illustrates that Afghanistan is not an agriculture country; its largest industry is war, then drugs, then services while agriculture can be considered fourth or fifth down in the list.[19]

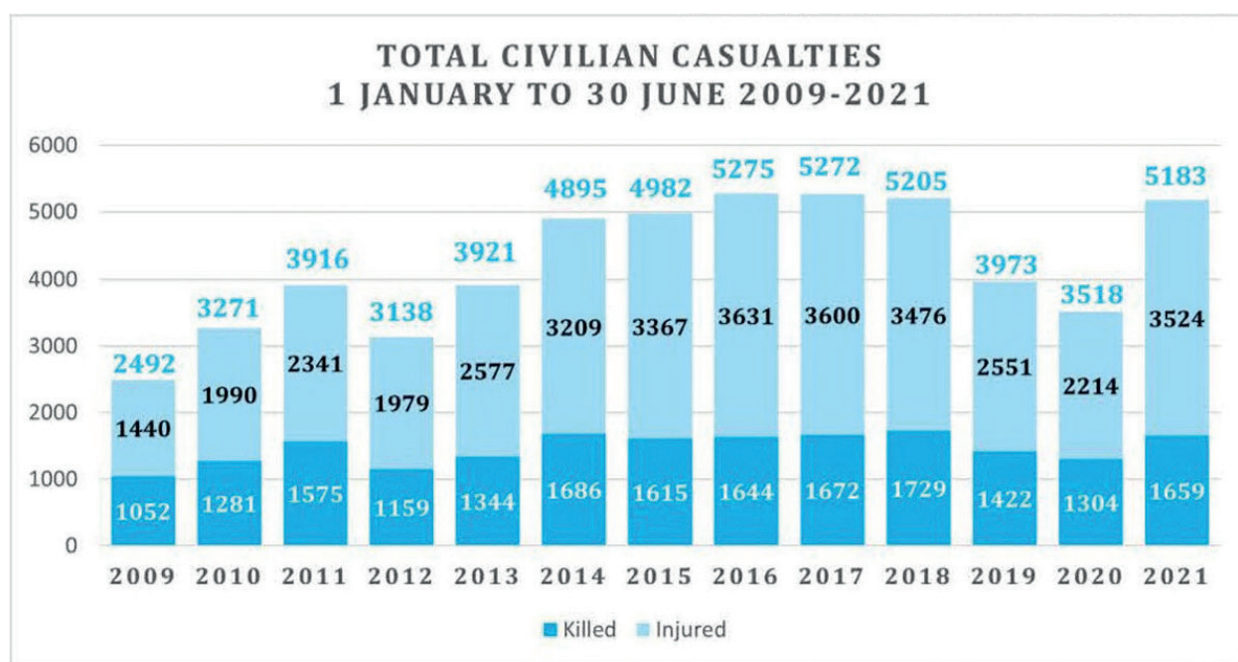
In fact, Afghanistan never had a modern state;[23] therefore, from the very beginning of the United States’ invasion in Afghanistan, the external state-building seemed a daunting task to achieve its goal of installing a stable democratic government. A senior State department member told Craig Whitlock in a lesson learnt interview that after 9/11 the U.S. invaded Afghanistan reflexively without knowing what they were trying to achieve. [24] As Thomas Barfield [20] stated that in pre-modern Afghanistan whoever gained power and could hold it considered legitimate if he could provide security and fend the off rivals, seems correct even now; as the Taliban denied the sole authority of the United State installed government in Kabul, which never gained

a public legitimacy in past two decades.

In addition, after spending nearly 2 trillion dollars, nearly 66,000 Afghan military and national police killed in the conflict, according to a report calculating the costs of the war and 47,245 Afghan civilians have been killed, per Brown University’s Costs of War project. Whereas, in the first half of 2021 alone, there were 1,659 Afghan civilians killed and 3,524 wounded — a 47 percent increase compared with the same period last year — the United Nations Assistance

Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported by Adela Suliman, but the United States has never accomplished the objective of installing a democratic, capable, responsive and accountable government in Kabul, which can provide the basic public services like public health care, power, transportation infrastructure and other basic services.[25]

The chart below portrays the civilian casualties per each year since 2009 as documented by UNAMA; it illustrates rise in the civilian casualties which aims



**Figure 1.** The civilian casualties per each year since 2009 as documented by UNAMA [25].

that the counterinsurgency strategy of the United States was not effective in protecting civilians through these years.

To understand the failure or success of the United States counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan; we are required to understand the capabilities of the Indigenous government in running the country: political legitimacy of the government, good governance capabilities and capacity of the security forces in fighting the insurgency on the ground.

Whereas, Afghan warlords were another big challenge for winning counterinsurgency in Afghanistan; warlords and tribal militia posed a significant challenge to the counterinsurgency campaign during past two decades; Afghan governments tried their best to reassign the warlords away from their geographical power bases but their local networks continued to influence the local administration and challenge the central governments, such as, when Afghan Local Police (ALP) failed in

Wardak Province in 2012; McChrystal's population centric counterinsurgency was considered a failure, the United States started equipping and supporting local anti-Taliban factions who were known as former warlords in the province.[22]

Anand Gopal writes that Afghan state became criminalized, one of the most corrupt in the world, as thoroughly wicked as the warlords it sought to outflank.[26]

In addition, for the United State to win the counterinsurgency war against Taliban they required to understand the "Taliban's" political, military structure and the population where they obtain shelter and recruitment.[27]

The International Community led by U.S. failed in all above three dimensions, they were conflicting themselves by supporting Pakistan's role in combating Taliban and supporting a corrupt government in Kabul for past two decades.

Afghanistan's mountainous terrain provided a particularly useful sanctuary for Taliban because it was difficult for Afghan Government and U.S. forces to navigate them easily; in addition to their main hideouts in Pakistan and on the Durand Line; the general Afghanistan's terrain was also helpful for "Taliban's" resurgence and fighting the U.S. longest war of the history.

Indeed, the success of any counterinsurgency campaign requires a long-term commitment on the political, economic and military fronts to be coordinated with relevant operations on the ground to defeat the insurgency and win "brain and mind" of local population. History reveals that most of the counterinsurgency campaigns are not won by external forces, but by indigenous forces; therefore, building local capacity to fight the insurgency is far more significant than the capacity of the occupier forces.

Since the beginning of the U.S. invasion

in Afghanistan; it seemed that the United States have underestimated the significance of the Indigenous government's capability to fight the insurgency on the ground; there were very little attention to support and create a trained a capable police and army in Afghanistan.

In counterinsurgency campaigns, the police must be involved in the community at all levels, such as monitoring border posts, and patrolling cities, villages, and highways; in fact, building the police in counterinsurgency should be a first priority than the creation of the army because the police are the primary forces of the government in towns and villages across the country. Unfortunately, this goal was not achieved in Afghanistan.

The Taliban were able enough to fight the Afghan government on many levels, as the capability of the government forces were challenged by vast corruption on their leadership level, lacking training fighting a hit and run tactical war, lacking strong leadership, many were led by local strongmen or warlords; for example, in his two terms elected government, Hamid Karzai had only limited control over his own government, many of his top officials led militias that had fought against Taliban with U.S. support and which lacked legitimacy and resources like ammunition, transportation capabilities and were politically divided which aggravated the problem of the lack of effective leadership on the ground to fight Taliban insurgency and win the war for their country.[20].

The very spread of corruption – which Jones defines as the misuse of entrusted power for private gain - undermined all that could have been achieved by undermining public support for the government and increased support for Taliban in the outskirts of main cities of the country.

In fact, endemic corruption hampered

economic growth, undermined the rule of law, and vastly damaged the legitimacy of the government across the country [28]. As Francis Fukuyama [23] defines a good state institution must transparently and efficiently serve the needs of its citizen; the objective of installing such a good government in Afghanistan was never achieved.

Another factor, which undermined the United States counterinsurgencies efforts in Afghanistan, was external support for Taliban in the region which directly correlates with insurgents' success on the ground.

External support can take two forms: first, foreign governments; diaspora or international networks can provide direct assistance to the insurgents and second, is the freedom to use foreign territory as a sanctuary. In the case of Taliban, received both from Pakistan.

The Pakistani state directly supported "Taliban's" member to obtain training, medical treatment in Pakistan. Meanwhile Pakistani sponsored Kashmir Jihadi groups supported by religion-political parties such as the Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI) were able to recruit and maintaining training bases in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda and Uzbek jihadist groups and the Islamic Movement of Easter-Turkistan (ETI) are also reported to have supported the Taliban across the Durand Line. [19]. In the sum, Afghan insurgency included a dangerous combination of local and transnational supportive groups.

As Parvez Musharraf (2006) claimed that their support for Taliban was for two reasons; first Taliban will bring peace to Afghanistan; second that Taliban will defeat anti-Pakistan Northern Alliance. In fact, the general belief among strategists was that Pakistan wanted a stake in Afghanistan, to ensure it did not end up with a government that was pro-India

in Kabul. [29] In terms of sanctuary, the availability of a territorial base for insurgents outside of their home state is directly correlated with the failure of the counterinsurgency efforts. [5] The Taliban were successful in gaining the second type of external support as using Pakistan's territory to rest, regroup, receive medical care and recruit for their season war in Afghanistan during past two decades.

In fact, JUI purposefully handed over Pushtunabad, a large sprawling outskirts of Quetta, Baluchistan to the Afghan Taliban; they forced or bought out the local residents and soon owned every home, shot, tea stall and even hotels in this area; new Madrassas were built to recruit a new young generation for their war in Afghanistan. [19].

The ISI and other Pakistan government agencies provided several types of crucial assistance to Taliban:

- Medical care was provided to the injured Taliban who retreated from fighting in Afghanistan.

- Pakistan hosted several of "Taliban's" main training bases.[20]

- They provided Taliban intelligence assistance to aim timely their targets inside Afghanistan. [30]

- Pakistan also provided Taliban financial resources, liquidated their narco funds, allowed them to collect local donations and receive donations from Gulf countries. [19]

- Pakistan assisted Taliban in logistics in crossing the Durand Line on timely basis in spite of having Border Management, SoP agreements with Afghan Government in past two decades.[30]

While Ali Jalali adding to the above list of assistance; that Pakistan is providing Taliban staging areas, recruiting centers (madrassas) and safe havens to launch war inside Afghanistan.[31] In addition, the "Taliban's" economic resources derived



from networks to the Afghan Diaspora in Pakistan, Gulf and to the Pakistani administration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan [19].

### **Conclusion**

Governance challenges, external support for Taliban and weak capacity of indigenous security forces were critical factors in failing the United States counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan. External factors play a significant role in failed counterinsurgency efforts, particularly. Pakistan's military establishment's approach to the war as a function of its main institutional and national security interests.

An even greater role was played by the failure to increase the capacity of the Indigenous government. The United States should have focused more on the efforts to improve the performance and legitimacy of the Afghan Government and improving the quality of police and other security forces rather than focusing solely on fighting the Taliban.

Finally, to win counterinsurgency campaign in any country; it is essential to transform the weak state into a legitimate and more stable state to prevail its acceptance across the population. One aspect of this is working with indigenous forces (especially police), effectively train and mentor them as quickly as possible and momentarily back-fill indigenous forces with enough forces to achieve the stated security tasks.

A lesson for future counterinsurgency operations is that is crucial to empower local forces like police and army and local administrations to be able to hold their territory long enough to re-establish close working relations with local people to deny sanctuary to the insurgents. Counterinsurgency involves the attempts governments make to restore peace. The aim is to minimize civilian deaths while strengthening the influence of governments. No strategy exists-counterinsurgent forces combine psychological, military, economic and political techniques.

The U.S. could have done more to try to defeat the insurgency and counter terrorist groups in Afghanistan as well as to achieve state building and peace building objectives if they could have convinced the region, especially Pakistan to cooperate towards these aims Afghan problem. Meanwhile, the United State should not have limited its counterinsurgency efforts to the territory of Afghanistan, but chased the insurgents inside Pakistan, Iran, and other regions where their sanctuaries were located.

To sum up, this research paper argues that poor governance, vast corruption, lack of regional cohesion in defeating "Taliban's" insurgency especially Pakistan's frequent negative interference in Afghanistan and lack of legitimacy of the Afghan Government has undermined the United States counterinsurgency efforts in past two decades in Afghanistan.

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