Conclusion
CONCLUSION

At the outset it is being submitted that this study is not an attempt to provide policy prescriptions to the US policy makers for conducting its relations with the Afghanistan during the emergence and decline of the Taliban. It is simply a stock-taking exercise, essentially endeavoring to reveal the un-highlighted facts in the US approach towards the Taliban. It is amidst a plethora of biased literature and propaganda, the current research attempts to seek an objective understanding of the intricacies and dynamics of the US policy towards the Taliban and the factors that compelled US policymakers to deal with the Taliban. This work looks at the US policy towards Taliban from a regional perspective to bring out the implications for South Asia from such policy.

The US policy towards Afghanistan has been characterised by periods of attention and inattention towards that country. It is also important to note that the lack of attention to a distant country called Afghanistan by US policy makers led to a situation of chaos and anarchy which was exploited by other external powers like to its advantage. A brief survey of US-Afghan relations accentuates the fact that Afghanistan, a neutral country had many a times approached the United States for military and economic aid. The failure to receive positive response from the US had increasingly tilted towards the Soviet Union. A purposeful United States engagement in Afghanistan begun in the Cold War period, though at a minimal level. The minor contacts before that period was limited to signing of economic agreements for providing aid and other forms of assistance, occasional visits and statements, which were more of a customary nature. It was a spirit of neglect that ruled the roost in that period.

With the onset of the cold war, Afghanistan emerged as one of the many theatres of conflict and played the traditional role of buffer between the two super powers. The Soviet attempt to create a client state since 1956 renewed American interests in the region, leading to a major policy reorientation and beginning of competitive aid giving. Thus in the late 1950's and 1960's, Afghanistan became a peaceful battle ground of the cold war with the Soviet-American rivalry being based on the value of their respective
foreign aid programme. However, in the late 1960’s the détente between the US and the USSR weakened competitive aid giving. Afghanistan was no longer a priority for US foreign policy compared to US commitments in the Southeast Asia. Conversely in 1973, Daoud’s increasing tilt towards the US and its allies led to improvement of relations between the two countries. Since the 1978 Saur revolution, the leftist regime’s proximity with the Soviets led the Carter administration to consider funding Afghan Islamic groups in Pakistan to curtail the ever-growing Soviet influence in the region.

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan gave a tactical push to the American approach in the region and broadened policy options. Along with the pursuit to contain Communism, it was an opportunity to inflict a la-Vietnam on the Soviets. It is significant to observe that during the cold war, the United States used Islam as a tool to fight communism. A brief survey of America’s flirtation with Islam by installing friendly and extremist regimes is a classic case of ‘blowback’. In Afghanistan Islam was used to fight the godless Soviets by both, the external powers like the United States and the mujahideen. The increased US aid to the Afghan mujahideen groups should be interpreted in this light. The present research is of the opinion that the foundation of a decadent Afghanistan was laid in that period. By arming the mujahideen, the United States not only succeeded in bleeding the Soviets white in Afghanistan, but also laid ground for regional powers like Pakistan to play an interventionist role in Afghan politics and in a way set the path for the emergence of Taliban.

With the departure of the Soviets, Afghanistan came to symbolize a major success story against the Communists, both for the Americans and the Islamists. While it led to a swift conclusion to American interest in the region and the mujahideens were left alone to fight among themselves, the Islamists were encouraged to fight larger battles outside as witnessed by the founding of organizations like Al Qaeda. Afghanistan was back to the days of chaos and disorder, though of a different variety. The puppet regime of Najibullah was neither capable nor willing to hammer out a peaceful compromise formula among the warring parties. Thus, for Afghanistan the end of the cold war instead of bringing peace, turned the buffer state into an arena of regional conflict. Najibullah’s
departure again led a situation of various mujahideen leaders occupying the seats of power in Kabul until the Taliban managed to dominate the center stage.

While Afghanistan definitely exhibited incapacity to resolve its internal contradictions due to intense power struggle between the various mujahideen groups, its tragedy lies in the fact that time and again these contradictions seem to get trapped in the agenda of external powers. The interference by these regional powers is further compounded by religious and ethnic affiliations shared by these powers with the myriad ethnic specific mujahideen groups and the support in terms of arms and aid to the mujahideen leaders has lead to continuance of the internecine warfare in Afghanistan. Thus this vicious circle of Afghanistan’s imbroglio stems mainly from two groups of actors. First, the ‘primary group’, consisting of the internal actors, each with its distinct ethnic and tribal identity. Second, the ‘secondary group’, that of the external actors, engaged in a sort of a game of self-aggrandizement by playing the internal actors one against the other, which leads to the further ethnic polarization of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, Islam has been a banner to unify against outside powers like the Soviets. But when it comes to internal power struggle, the mujahideen failed to unify as witnessed during the period before the rise of the Taliban where the ethnicity and tribal bonds superseded the religious.

The emergence of Taliban brought to light the interplay internal and external dynamics in Afghanistan. The initial welcome greeted to the Taliban by Afghan people as harbingers of ‘peace and stability’ later turned to disdain. Trained in the numerous madrassas in Pakistan, these religious students (Taliban) were less aware about the history of their country. The Taliban came to enforce an extreme form of Islam, quite alien to Afghan culture as they did by imposing the Pustun code of ethics which alienated the other ethnic groups. Hence, despite having to control two thirds of Afghanistan they were not successful in unifying the country as a whole.

The Taliban movement was a rare oddity in International Relations. They were seen as a stabilizing force emergent to purify and end the decadence of the Afghan society as a result of the power struggle between the various mujahideen groups. The Taliban’s initial
reluctance to take over positions of decision-making has been highlighted in a number of studies. However, zeal to clean the system of decadence let loose by the war mongering mujahideen factions formed the motivation for the Taliban to take up the reins of administration.

While a significant section of the available literature concentrates in defining the Taliban in religious terms, few focus on the role of their benefactors. It was mainly the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan at the behest of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States who promoted this brand of militant opposition against the Soviets during the cold war era. Funded and armed by the CIA, the mujahideens turned into a lethal force to counter the Soviets. A significant portion of the mujahideens later joined the Taliban giving it the form of a movement.

The rise of Taliban from the days of religious madrassas to seats of power during the Prime Ministership of Benazir Bhutto was a moment of glory not only for ordinary people, but also for their promoters who made no secret of their exhilaration. The causes lay in their goals of oil politics and a relatively stronger control of the growth and trade of narcotics in the region. The revival of American interest in the region needs to be seen in this context. While Afghanistan again was chosen by the Americans as the route for the transportation of Central Asian oil resources to Pakistan and possibly India, a motive which primarily aimed at isolating Iran and Russia, a bitter competition started between the American oil giant UNOCAL and the Argentine concern, Bridas. UNOCAL's supportive statements in favour of the Taliban's ascent to power underlined the American policy towards the region.

The Taliban regime was also expected to support the American move to prevent Afghanistan from emerging as a major narcotics producing centre. After all the Islamic Hudood laws discouraged the trade of narcotics. The initial Taliban promises notwithstanding, the actual production of drugs increased and it constituted a major source of income for the cash-starved Taliban.
Conclusion

There are reasons to believe that all these could have been tolerated had not the incident of September 1998 happened. The explosions targeting the United States’ embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, pushed all other issues to the background. The reaction was both direct and indirect. The United States launched cruise missile attacks on what was considered to be the camps of bin Laden in Afghanistan. After this failed mission, the American policy pressurized Pakistan, Saudi Arabia to persuade the Taliban to hand over bin Laden which yielded no result. Terrorism became the buzzword and Osama Bin Laden became the target of ‘new terrorism’ for the US policy makers during Clinton’s tenure.

Discovery of one vice in the Taliban led to the discovery of a number of vices. Issues remaining un-highlighted for so long received promotion. Taliban began to be censured for woman rights violation, non-cooperation in the recovery of the Stinger missiles pushing the country to the hub of Islamic fundamentalism and a criminalized economy, and initiating a forced migration process. While the truth in these charges are beyond doubt, the fact remains that the United States chose to be indifferent to all these issues for far too long. The United States policy of sanctions and cruise missile attacks proved counterproductive leading to greater isolation and defiance of the Taliban as also to its increasing dependence in a symbiotic relationship with the Al Qaeda.

Objective analysis of the United States’ sudden disinterest in the region after the Soviet withdrawal and the sudden arousal of fascination after the Taliban’s emergence, reveals the complexities of the mechanism that shapes American foreign policy. The important role of the President needs to be supplemented with that of an activist Secretary of State, the Congress various lobbies and pressure groups. The perfect interplay of all these forces gives shape to the dynamics of American foreign policy. The censure of Taliban on the violation of women rights issue is a classic example of this phenomenon. Only after the personal interest of the Secretary of State, Madeline Albright came into play supplemented by the refugee Afghan groups in the United States, various women NGOs and lobbies that the US administration came to initiate strong steps against the Taliban. The role played by the Hollywood stars and the demands of an election situation
necessitating the maintenance of a vote bank, forced the Clinton administration to express its disapproval of the Taliban policy in no uncertain terms.

Very few studies have been able to delve into the secret organization of the Taliban or into the symbiotic relationship between the Taliban - Al Qaeda. While US policy under Clinton administration of subjecting Afghanistan under the Taliban to sanctions proved counter productive, it increasingly led to Taliban’s dependence on the Al Qaeda. The symbiotic relationship between the Taliban and the Al Qaeda strengthened after the failed cruise missile attack in Afghanistan. This was an instance of a terrorist organization controlling a state, a phenomena not represented elsewhere. The Al Qaeda provided the Taliban with financial and military aid and the Taliban true to its code of ethics protected its honoured guests even at the cost of its existence. Thus, attempts of US policy makers on the issue of Osama bin Laden proved unsuccessful. The lack of understanding of Islam and ethno-tribal idiosyncrasies led to floundering of US policy towards Taliban. The resultant terrorists attacks of September 11, 2001 on US homeland had emanated from Afghanistan under Taliban completely caught the Bush administration unprepared and a nation ‘shocked’.

When President George Bush came into office in January 2001, it was against this rhetoric of the "multi-lateral" Clinton years that Bush foreign policy would be measured. George Bush took office following a campaign in which he condemned "nation-building," rejected most pending and a few existing treaties, and promised that US troops would never become involved in peacekeeping. It is also to be noted that US under President Bush was increasingly taking on an isolationist stance. In the month’s preceding September 11, the Bush administration went several steps farther. All its initiatives and statements on national missile defense, the withdrawal from six treaties in as many months, the criticism of nation-building were efforts to disentangle itself from the rest of the world. It was undeniably "the troubles of the globe" and their after-bite from which US elites sought to insulate themselves.
Conclusion

Bush began his presidency with a policy of belligerent unilateralism, vis a vis Clinton’s rhetoric of multi-lateralism. All major actors on Bush’s foreign policy team were in agreement that American hegemony on a global scale was not only possible but also appropriate. But within that broad political agreement there was a big strategic debate over just how that U.S. domination could best be achieved. The debate began right at the beginning, during the early 2001 confirmation hearings in the Senate for Bush’s cabinet choices between Secretary of State Colin Powell on the one hand, and the Pentagon chiefs, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz on the other. Powell envisioned a U.S.-dominated international “consensus,” however militarized it might be, in whose name U.S. policies could be imposed. Wolfowitz and his semi-official Defense Policy Board of hard-line rightwing hawks, demanded a unilateral assertion of military power as the first-choice option. They viewed the U.S. as an unchallenged superpower that needs to pay little attention to the views of its allies.

The huge Public support for the U.S. war in Afghanistan seemed to be rooted in the sudden sense of vulnerability that accompanied with the loss of national pride. It was in this context of extreme ambiguity that ‘self-defense’ and ‘anti-terrorism’ took hold as the new twin pillars of U.S. foreign policy. This framework supplanted not only the anti-communism of the Cold War and George Bush Senior’s New World Order, but laid to rest as well the global interventionism camouflaged as multilateralism at the heart of the Clinton’s foreign policy. By the end of the year, 2001, the Bush administration's increasingly unilateralist position had been consolidated while maintaining a highly public effort to don the mantle of international coalitions and partnerships as the seeming linchpin of the Global War on Terrorism during the Afghan war. It was a claim by a few top officials in the generally unilateralist Bush administration and a broad swath of similarly inclined U.S. policymakers, but it was a claim that most of the world understood to be false.

The US military action in Afghanistan was largely successful in realizing the primary goals of vanquishing the Taliban’s political power and destroying Al Qaeda’s infrastructure in Afghanistan. However, having ignored the larger goals of reconstruction
and having alienated the Afghan population, by aerial bombing causing civilian casualties, a space has been created for the resurgence of the Taliban. Given the latest incidents of rising terrorism and the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan from the Pak-Afghan border underscores that the Taliban-Al Qaeda nexus remains intact with support base in Pakistan and definitely a spoiler in rebuilding Afghanistan. The myopic military option led to a situation of decimation of Taliban, but not its complete elimination.

As Operation Enduring Force attests, it is perfectly possible to pursue Al Qaeda and similar groups in a single-minded fashion, with inadequate attention to the stability problems that beset the nations and regions in which these groups nest. But this approach is a myopic one that poorly serves the longer-term goal of curbing the new terrorism. With regard to operations in Afghanistan, a balanced approach would have attended equally to the immediate task of disrupting Al Qaeda and the broader tasks of stabilizing Afghanistan and preserving stability in the region. At minimum, the immediate tasks regarding Al Qaeda should have been undertaken in a way that did not exacerbate other, related problems. Giving more time and attention to political and diplomatic efforts might even have obviated large-scale military action.

Until the 9/11 attacks, New Delhi was seen by the Clinton and Bush administrations as a rising power and a possible strategic partner. At the same time, Pakistan was seen as a failing and a floundering state. Thus, consolidating United States’ ties with India, securing a moderate Muslim state in Pakistan, actively encouraging peaceful relations between Pakistan and India, ensuring an Afghanistan where terrorists can never again find shelter were the broad US objectives in South Asia.

With 9/11, counterterrorism became the top American priority. Pakistan emerged as an important partner, an indispensable player in America’s war on trans-national terrorism. Degradation of the operational capabilities of the Al Qaeda and affiliated Taliban remnants became an impossibility for the Bush administration without tactical cooperation from Pakistan. The Musharraf regime in Pakistan too displayed an adroit
decision to align itself with the United States. In response to a US ultimatum to join the war on Al Qaeda and the Taliban, or risk becoming a target, President Musharraf dumped the Taliban, which had been viewed for years by successive Pakistani governments as its best hope to ensure a friendly government on its western border and to provide Pakistan strategic depth against rival India. Pakistan also started clamping down on Islamist militant groups based in Pakistan.

However, the US-Pakistan counter terrorism cooperation has had little impact on the Taliban movement most of which operate within the western borders of Pakistan. The Afghan government, on numerous occasions, has blamed the Pakistan authorities for not doing enough about it. Islamabad’s efforts to check extremism and prevent the infiltration of anti-regime insurgents are described as inconsistent, incomplete, and at times insincere. NATO military officials have complained that the Pakistan army has stood idle as hundreds of Taliban fighters infiltrate into Afghanistan. Pakistan on the other hand, is wary that any Afghan government might fall under the influence of India. Pakistan alleges that India is using its diplomatic facilities in Afghanistan to train and recruit anti-Pakistan insurgents. Pakistan’s ability to sustain effective cooperation with the United States over the long term remains, however, in question.

Before the strategic alliance with Pakistan took place, the United States had developed a close relationship with India on the Afghanistan issue. The events of September 2001 led to closer ties between India and the United States. They seemed to validate India’s views regarding the threat of Islamic terrorism and increased India’s sense of righteousness.

Post September 11, the United States policy towards India and Pakistan is increasingly witnessing de-hyphenation of relationship. While India is emerging as an important partner in the US long term goals of countering China, Pakistan is viewed as a important ally in counter terrorism operations in Pakistan –Afghanistan border. The unfolding events in South Asia has led to greater interest of the United States in the region’s conflicts. While the decline of the Taliban has proved beneficial for Indian and US

173
interests, Pakistan’s loss of strategic depth in Afghanistan could result in greater interventionist role in that country and its own instability.