ABSTRACT

Afghanistan's history is quite unique where it's political, internal and external affairs were always mired in the projection of regional and super powers. Since ancient time Afghanistan had always been the land of conquest for other powers. Afghanistan's strategic location between Central and South Asia is of immense geo-strategic significance for the landlocked countries of the Central Asia. The resurgence of great powers' interests in Central Asia in recent years has made Afghanistan once again a much coveted strategic pivot in the current Great Game. It's very geographical location as a buffer state plunged it into the ground of proxy politics of super power during the cold war period. After the end of the cold war once again it plunged Civil War which was exploited by regional powers as a vehicle to settle the against their rival states. In 21st century the Afghan's wounds which suffered a long battle history is not yet better. After the event of 11 September 2001 on Afghanistan became the military base/ground for the U.S. for hunting down bases/groups with a long term plan to secure military base in order to protect energy interest. It also could serve as a replacement once the oil reserves start depleting seriously by the middle of the next century.

This thesis is a modest attempt to study the U.S. Afghanistan policy which has remained involved in its affairs since pre-World War II. The event of 11 September 2001 has rekindled the U.S. interest in the region once again. This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with historical background of the U.S Afghanistan relations since pre-World War II to the end of World War II. In modern time the U.S. started considering the importance of Afghanistan's geo-strategy since the outbreak of World War II. The advance of German forces towards Stalingrad led to the fears that the logistic link through western Iran would be denied to allies, and hence eastern Iran or western Afghanistan were considered as significant locales for an alternate route. In 1942 the U.S. formally established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan. After the end of World War II the containment, circling and rolling back communism became major U.S. foreign policy concerns. The U.S. tried to bring countries settled along the Soviet Union border (it was well-known southern frontier) into its military alliance which would be an effective containment of the Soviet Union on its southern frontier. Afghanistan is a much country close to Soviet Union.
border. It was considered suitable for rolling back the spread of communism in this region. In 1979 when Russian army invaded Afghanistan it became a buffer zone and proxy war ground. The U.S. and its allies supported Afghan Muslim guerrillas, ranging from indirect financial assistance, weapon, and military training support to encourage the influx of foreign volunteers from different countries to join with the Mujahideen forces (Islamic guerrilla) for sucking the Soviet into Vietnamese quagmire.

The second chapter deals about the involvement of the U.S. in the Afghan civil war (1992-1996). This chapter attempt to find out why, how and with what political objectives the U.S. came to involve in the Afghan civil war. The end of Cold War which followed with the collapse of the Soviet Union finally led to an end of Afghan-communist regime in 1992. The civil war in Afghanistan soon became the ground of proxy war of regional powers who exploited the factional rivalry in Afghan’s civil war as their vehicle to preserve their interest or to use against its rival state. The fall of pro U.S Shah regime in Iran caused the U.S. to worry about the security of this region. Therefore containing Iran became a major U.S. foreign policy goal in this region. The U.S. sympathy with Taliban (Sunni) group was because of its rivalry with pro-communist Russian group (Northern Alliance) and their anti-Iran stance.

The third chapter deals about the U.S., Afghanistan and the problem of terrorism (1996-2001). This chapter traces the rise of Islamic extremism in Afghanistan. It seeks to find out how the U.S. got involved with Islamic extremist group (Taliban). It is also attempted to see why and how this Islamic extremist group turned against the U.S. and how the U.S. handled such forces in Afghanistan. After the end of the Cold War the U.S. has been gradually under attack by Islamic extremist groups both within the country and also in foreign countries especially in Middle East. The Islamic fighters who had come from different countries used Afghanistan as their base for training and to carry out global jihad of which the U.S. and Israel were the prime target. The U.S. alleged that the extremists were commanded by Bin Laden and had collaborated with Taliban regime. Taliban provided all facility and basic need to run their camp. In fact the Islamic extremists had developed its global Jihad agenda since 1989 and after Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Mujahideen turned their jihad against the U.S. and Israel and pledged to root out U.S. influence in the Middle Eastern countries. After several incidents of terrorist attack on the U.S. especially
after its embassies in Nairobi and the Dar-es-Salam, Tanzania were bombed in 1998, the U.S. alleged that Bin Laden was masterminded behind the scene. The tension between the U.S. and Afghanistan (Taliban regime) over Bin Laden’s extradition continued till 11 September 2001 terrorists’ strike on the U.S. in which about 5000 people were killed. This incident confirmed that the U.S. homeland itself was vulnerable to the consequences of its foreign policies and that determined enemies could attack and inflict horrendous damage upon U.S. cities. Terrorism replaced communism as the source of fear and loathing the war the U.S. has been fighting abroad since 1947 had finally reached its shores. This event, the U.S. alleged, was launched by Afghanistan based Al-Qaeda group. Thus the U.S. moved its forces to attack Afghanistan in order to root out Al-Qaeda base and to replace hostile regime with a pro-U.S. regime in Afghanistan.

The fourth chapter deals about the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan after the event of 11 September 2001. This part of the study primarily focuses on the U.S. war on terror. It examines the U.S. claim that it acquired the right to attack and remove Al-Qaeda base in Afghanistan after it was attacked by terrorist group on 11 September 2001. This incident triggered the U.S. and some of its allies from NATO to move with large number of forces to set up its military base in Afghanistan in order to tackle the problem of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan effectively.

The event of September 11, 2001 and the resulting conflict in Afghanistan signified not only the beginning of a new era in world politics, but also led to struggle for influence in new energy resources heartland - Central Asia. As the geography of Central Asia is a land lock nature it has to be depend on another country to run its energy through pipeline route to the world market. There is a plan of construction of a massive new oil and gas pipeline stretching along East-West energy corridor that will link Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and ultimately Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Afghanistan is one country which could provide an alternate rout outlet to Arabian Sea via Pakistan port. But the success of the project of oil pipeline which would pass through Afghanistan depends on stability in Afghanistan. The events of 11 September 2001 provided opportunity to the U.S. to replace Afghanistan's hostile Taliban regime with a pro-U.S. government so that the project of running oil and gas pipeline from Caspian Sea and Central Asia to southward (Afghanistan-Pakistan corridor or even beyond to India’s port) would be easier.
The movement of the U.S. and NATO forces into Afghanistan is perceived as an integral part of the U.S. plan to meet new security challenges of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. Nuclear Issue is an important factor which has influenced the course of international politics and diplomacy since the end of the Cold War. The West fears the threat which comes from nuclear proliferation by a number of third world countries, including the South Asian neighbours India and Pakistan. The U.S. believes that the spread of nuclear technology know-how and weapon capability to these countries would pose a threat to its own security and the world. The growing instability in Pakistan where Islamist groups have been challenging the Government is also a cause of concern. If Pakistan’s government is captured by some party which opposes the U.S. and nuclear arsenal falls in this group’s hand or some group having sympathy with Al-Qaeda or Taliban it will be dangerous situation so far as the U.S.’s interest in this region is concerned. If the Pakistani government losess control over nuclear proliferation by its scientist Abdul Qadir khan it could be sold to Iran, Libya or Al-Qaeda group. The U.S. is more worried about a scenario when such lethal weapons fall in the hand of its enemy.

The movement of the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan after 11 September was also perceived as a part of a long term strategy to contain Iran and enhancing security in the Gulf and the Middle East. Since Iranian revolution, which overthrew pro-U.S. regime (Shah) in 1978, up to now Iran has remained a threat to the strategic balance in West Asia, and being an obstacle to the U.S. hegemony in the region. Various issues make the U.S. worry about of Iran’s behaviour. Such as, it has been trying to get nuclear weapons which could disturb the balance in the region. Iran has also been backing Islamic groups (Hizbullah and Hamas) in this region to counter the aggressive Israeli behaviour toward Palestinians, Lebanon and unknown Arab countries in future. Moreover, the U.S. is more concerned about Iran playing vital role in Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline project to supply its energy resources to South Asia and probably would extend beyond to China which will be a major setback for the U.S. policy to exclude Iran from this region. Iran could also play key role in transporting energy resources of Central Asian countries where it could provide outlet route to the sea via its port. Iran and Russia are also playing vital role over energy of Caspian nation and both of them are against the presence of outside powers in the region and more concerned with preventing the U.S. from straddling the Caspian and the energy flows from the region.
The U.S. is worried about security of oil flow in the Arabian Gulf water that is the Strait of Hormuz Sea lanes through which passes the bulk of the global oil, could be blocked by Iran on the day the U.S. and Iran enter into serious conflict. The U.S. has been trying to do everything to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons and dominating the region. Therefore the movement of the U.S. and NATO forces into Afghanistan after 11 September 2001 was possibly as an integral part of a long term plan to contain Iran and preparing to invade Iran or to use forces to manage Iran if the situation necessitates.

The current U.S. policy towards Afghanistan especially after 11 September is also perceived as an integral part of a long-term plan to contain China. From 1991 to 2000 the security competition among the great powers was not obsolete, either in Europe or in Northeast Asia. The rise of China is the most dangerous threat to the US. Though Russia was defeated in the long-cold war but it still backs China to be a super power state as a counter-balance to the U.S. in this area. The growing industrial base makes China to look aggressively for energy resource to fuel its industrial need. China has replaced U.S.'s import market in many areas such as in Iran and Africa. Some Arab countries have also started looking east over their oil export market, especially in Central Asia and Caspian Sea. China had made agreement to import energy from this region through its pipeline to west of China. Recently China signed an energy agreement with Iran which involved constructing an oil pipeline from Iran to the Caspian Sea, from there would link up with the planned pipeline from China to Kazakhstan. China has also planned to build railway track to connect western China-Pakistan and Iran so that China could transport energy from Iran by land which is easier than through the Sea. The close boundary of China with Central Asian countries make China easy to transport whether by railway linkage or Pipeline. China has also revived the ancient Great Silk Route which will open up China's northern land border for direct links with Europe and the Middle East via Central Asia.

The most concerned thing for the U.S. about China is its key role in developing the lethal weapons and civilian nuclear project of Iran. China-Iran cooperation threatened to diminish the military advantages the U.S. enjoyed vis-à-vis Iran and increased Iran's ability to threaten the Sea-lanes and oil supplying states of the Persian Gulf. This conflict between China and the U.S. was manifested in the areas of nuclear energy, guided and ballistic missiles, and dual use goods relevant to production of chemical or advanced conventional weapons. China regarded that Iran
could play key role to counter the U.S. hegemony in this region. Such behaviour made U.S. aware about China’s role in this region. Thus there was little doubt that the movement of the U.S. and NATO forces into Afghanistan after 11 September seemed centered on its security establishment and focused on the alleged threats from major rival states notably China and Russia. Moreover, the presence of the U.S. in this region could lock out China from the energy business as the U.S. feared that China could assist the Central Asian Republics in setting up their own oil companies.

The movement of U.S. and NATO forces into Afghanistan after 11 Sept 2001 was also perceived as an integral part of a plan to round up or circle the influence of Russia which has been creeping in Central Asia’s region. Among the major U.S. foreign policy concern after 11 Sept was to establish its influence in newly independent nations comprising the commonwealth of independent states (CIS) or Central Asia. The U.S. would maintain the new world order by rooting out and limiting Moscow’s influence in this region.

Russia has huge reserved energy resources. It will play a key role in European market by selling its energy to EU market. Russia used energy as a weapon against U.S. hegemony in Europe. Russia attempted to control the flow of oil and gas from Caspian Sea and Central Asian countries. It has been viewed in the west as an attempt by the Russian security establishment to impose a single direction for the pipelines via Russian territory. This would give Russia tremendous control over the flow of oil and gas to western markets and will make the west vulnerable to Russia’s political whims. Russian energy policy could also be part of an overall policy which aims to keep the west out of Central Asian countries preserving it under an exclusively Russian sphere of influence. While Russia tried to establish monopoly over energy resources of this region and dismantle U.S. position in the region. Therefore, denying Russia the right to influence the regional economy and politics seemed to be the major concern of the United States. The scrambling over energy resources in Central Asia and Caspian Sea made Afghanistan never end from being a proxy war ground when the U.S. was looking for the way to make Afghanistan as a land-bridge to build pipeline route from Central Asia to world market through Afghanistan to Pakistan’s or India’s port.

Recently Russia has been moving spirit behind the idea of gas OPEC an organisation of natural gas producing nations. The new body was formalized at a meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) in Doha, Qatar, on 9 April 2007. It will unite Russia, Iran and Qatar, which account for 60 per cent of global gas
reserve, with Algeria, Venezuela and Central Asian gas exporting countries. The idea of a gas OPEC has rattled the U.S and Europe as it would shift the alignment of forces in the energy markets and leave them out in the cold. Russia has been trying to offset Western efforts to control the energy markets. Russia using energy resources and arms export potentially to project its influence across the world. The political objective of Russia is to control Middle East petroleum and to deny to the NATO members and to Japan, in a prelude to a general conventional war, and in contriving interruptions in supply that could be turned to the Soviet advantage by splitting allies from the United States in a divisive tactic to create oil shortages as a means of weakening allied commitments to the U.S. led security arrangements.

Apart from this recently Russia defied U.S. efforts to isolate Iran, by supplying $ 700 million worth of Tom 1 advanced air defence missile systems to Tehran in 2006. It was the biggest of several defence contracts between Moscow and Tehran since 2000. Iran armed with Russian weapons and pursuing a common energy strategy may emerge as Russia’s strategic partner in West Asia. Russia also supported Iran to build a railway line along the Caspian linking Iran with Russia. It will be part of the north-south transport corridor, a joint project of Russia, Iran and India.

Thus after the 11 Sept event the U.S. and NATO forces moved into Afghanistan, to replace U.S. hostile regime with a pro-US one and to set up its military base in Afghanistan probably as a long-term plan to ensure its presence in this region to contain Iran, Russia, and China.

The fifth chapter deals with the concluding remarks and the major findings. The study found that Afghanistan has always been mired in the complicated projection of the super powers since ancient time. The geographical location of Afghanistan has made it a strategically important area for the United States to maintain its political and economic interest since the end of World War II. During the Cold War Afghanistan had been a buffer zone to contain the spread of communism into Indian subcontinent and the Middle East. After the end of the Cold War Afghanistan also had been the ground of proxy war for the U.S. to threaten Iran. After a pro-US regime of Shah of Iran was overthrown by anti-US Islamic extremist group in 1979, Iran became a prime threat to its economic interests and political hegemony in the Gulf region. In the future Afghanistan might serve as a military base for the U.S. to attack Iran if it becomes necessary. Afghanistan could also be a base for the U.S. to monitor Pakistan's nuclear threat in future when internal political instability
might lead to a situation where power is captured by a party having sympathy with Taliban. In the 21st century the world enters into an energy war era where Afghanistan lies on the path of energy pipeline from newly independent Central Asian Countries and Caspian Sea which have huge reserves of energy resources that made the west to believe that it could make the region as the Persian Gulf of the next century. It could also serve as a replacement once the oil reserves in the gulf start depleting seriously by the middle of the next century. Therefore in the future Afghanistan might still be under the complicated projection of not only the United States but also of the new rising powers and regional states.