INTRODUCTION

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 geostrategic significance for the landlocked countries of 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 powers during the cold war period. After the end of the Cold War once again it plunged into Civil War which was exploited by regional powers as a vehicle to settle their score against their rival states. Even in the 21st century the wound of Afghan people who suffered a lot from long battles in the past has not yet healed. The event of 11 September 2001 once again made Afghanistan the battle ground of energy war of this century.

This thesis attempts to study about the U.S. Afghanistan policy which has remained involved in Afghanistan affairs since pre-World War II. The event of 11 September 2001 has rekindled the U.S. interest in the region once again. In order to make systematic presentation of the issues discussed, the study 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. The first chapter seeks to find out when, how, why, and what mattered to the U.S. in dealing with Afghanistan during said period. The U.S. came to involve with Afghanistan’s affairs since it was under the pressure of expansion of British India and Czarist Russia. Afghanistan started looking for a third power which could serve as a balance of power. Afghanistan was afraid of the fact that once it enters into any alliance with the U.S. it could enable British India and Czarist Russia to intimidate it. Consequently during this period there was no major breakthrough in diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Afghanistan as the U.S. was also aware of the fact that Afghanistan was under Russia influence. Moreover, after communist revolution the U.S. attitude towards Russia has been remained hostile. However, in 1942 the U.S. and Afghanistan formally established diplomatic relations on very firm basis. 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. The presence of the U.S. in Kabul was seen as an essential prerequisite for securing this route. In June 1942, the first US ambassador was dispatched to Afghanistan. The main reason behind the U.S. decision to forge close relationship with Afghanistan was more because of its strategic significance.

The next part of chapter one deals about the U.S. policy toward Afghanistan after the end of World War II up to the end of cold war (1945-1989). This part of the study try to find out why and how the geo-strategy of Afghanistan came to play key role for the U.S. in pursuing its policy of containing, encircling and rolling back the spreading of communist Russia. It also seeks to analyse how the U.S. turned Afghanistan to be the ground of proxy war to suck the Soviet troops into Vietnamese quagmire. 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 those country which settles 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 was one country which has geo-strategy close to Soviet Union border suitable for rolling back the spreading of communism in this region. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 the U.S. was quick to support Muslim guerillas (Mujahideen) ranging from indirect financial assistance to the weapon support and encouraging the influx of foreign volunteer from different countries to join with the Mujahideen forces in Afghanistan to fight and suck the Soviet troops into Vietnamese quagmire. It was the pressure of heavy arms supported by the U.S. and its allies to the Muslim guerillas (Mujahideen) which caused Soviet Union to withdraw its military from Afghanistan in 1989.

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 U.S. got involved in supporting factional group in Afghanistan in order to preserve its
various political objectives and interests. The discovery of huge energy resources in Central Asia and Caspian Sea was one of the most important reasons of the U.S. involvement with Afghan factional group. The U.S. knew that Afghanistan could be an alternative route to flow energy resources to the world market through pipeline from Central Asia via Afghanistan to Karachi port or India port. As Afghanistan was plunged into factional rivalries it was bound to cause difficulties in running this project. The stability in Afghanistan was a prerequisite for the U.S. and its allies and therefore they started searching for a factional group which could bring stability to Afghanistan so that the pipeline project would easily be built.

After the end of Cold War dual containment of Iran and Iraq became a major U.S. foreign policy goal. The U.S. (during Clinton administration) was clearly sympathetic to the Taliban as they were in line with its anti Iran policy. Taliban forces were supported by many Arab militants most of them were strongly anti-Shiite; they contributed accentuating the common prejudice among Afghan Sunni against the Hazara Shia, which was backed by Iran with the aim to counter the Pushtun Sunni (Taliban) that was supported by the United States, Saudi, and Pakistan. Fight fire with fire, was the U.S. reasoning: combat the militant Shiism of the Iranians with even greater militancy and violence by some groups which were considered as orthodox Sunni Muslims. Taliban also served as bulwark to counter the Russia’s influence in this region.

The third chapter deals about U.S. and the problem of terrorism (1996-2001) in the context of Afghanistan. In this chapter endeavor is made to find out when, why and how Islamic jihad group (Al-Qaeda) came to play an important role in Afghanistan’s affairs during Cold War time. How did the U.S. deal with Islamic jihad group/ Al-Qaeda/ in Afghanistan during Cold War? How Al-Qaeda group came to collaborate with Taliban in Afghanistan? After the end of Cold War why and how the Islamic Jihad group (Al-Qaeda) along with Taliban group turned against the U.S.? What is Al-Qaeda’s ideology and its political objective? Why the U.S. became the prime target of Al-Qaeda? How Afghan veteran (Al-Qaeda) commits its operation against the U.S. and its interest out of Afghanistan? How the U.S. handles with this terrorist group? During cold war time the proxy war tactic was a major instrument that was used by the U.S. to counter the expansion of communism around the globe. Afghanistan during 1979-1989 was one country that became the ground of proxy war where the U.S. backed Islamic fighters Mujahideen from around the world who had
come to Afghanistan to suck the Soviet troops into Vietnamese quagmire. It was following the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan in 1989 that the secret development of Islamic radical camp took place in Afghanistan. Afghan veteran (Mujahideen) saw the fall of the Soviet Union as a sign of total victory. Thereafter they advanced their world wide Jihad and where the next global primary targets of the Mujahideen were Israel, the U.S. and its interests which exist around the world.

Once Taliban established its complete control over Kabul in 1996 these groups of Jihad continue to use Afghanistan as the ground and base for training their men who came from different countries to carry out their global jihad. Since the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in 1989, the U.S. had gradually been under the attack from terrorist group several time whether in its homeland itself or in foreign countries and whether on its military or its civilian especially in Gulf countries and Africa. After several incidents of terrorist attacks 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 scène. The U.S. demanded that the Taliban must hand over Bin Laden to appropriate authorities but the Taliban ignored to do so.

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, 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.
After 11 September 2001, the U.S. led its forces to attack the Taliban regime in an attempt to destroy the foundations of Al-Qaeda. This was the first time since the Vietnam War that the U.S. led its military to attack a sovereign country under the war on terrorism. The U.S. tried its best to project its war in response to the 9/11 as part of a global war on terrorism, though the real motives included the projection of military power in the heartland of Asia, in the Caucasus and in the Middle East especially after the discovery of large energy resources in Caspian Sea and Central Asia. A land lock country has to be dependent on another country to run its petroleum energy resource through a pipe line route to the world market. Due to such geographical difficulties, countries around Caspian Sea and Central Asian region came to play important role in transporting energy of these land lock countries. One of these countries is Afghanistan which could provide a land-bridge from Central Asia to South Asia to flow their energy to the world market by running energy pipeline through Pakistan and Indian ports.

Energy security is an integral part of the U.S. war on terror. The U.S. is currently facing with new threats which challenge its energy security. In Saudi Arabia the main oil exporter to the U.S. it is facing various factions of Islamist groups who are opposed to U.S.'s hegemony in the Arab world and these groups try to pressurise Saudi government to keep distance from the U.S. as they feel disappointed due to the U.S. stance on Palestinian-Israel dispute. Another threat perception to the U.S. hegemony could be the Iran factor which is on the verge of developing nuclear technology which would create an imbalance in the region. In addition, it is believed that Iran was backing Islamic groups (Hizbullah and Hamas) in this region to counter aggressive Israeli behaviour towards Palestinians.

The U.S. administration is also worried about the growing instability in Pakistan where Islamic fundamentalist groups are posing a stiff challenge to the Government. The U.S. knows that if political power in Pakistan is captured by a group or a party which is opposed to the U.S. and if Pakistan's nuclear arsenal falls down in their hands or if Al-Qaeda expands its influence in Pakistan, it will be a serious danger to the U.S. interests in the region. The failure of Pakistan government to control the activities of its nuclear scientist Abdul Qadir Khan, who could sell nuclear technology to Iran, Libya or an Al-Qaeda group which, would be a disaster for the United States.
China as a big economic and military power with its fast growing industrial base is aggressively campaigning for searching an alternative energy resource to fuel its industrial needs. China has surpassed the U.S. as the biggest exporter of goods in many areas such as in Iran and Africa and some Arab countries have begun looking toward east for their oil export markets, especially in Central Asia and Caspian Sea region. China had entered into an agreement to import energy from this region through its pipeline in west of China. As china has close proximity with Central Asian states, it is more convenient and economical for it to transport it both by rail and through a pipeline. In addition, China has allegedly played a key role in developing lethal weapons and civilian nuclear projects of Iran, because China think that Iran could play a key role in countering U.S. hegemony in this region.

Moreover, after the break-up of the USSR, the re-emergence of Russia as a major economic and military power after a decade of instability has further compounded the U.S. woes. Russia has a huge reserve of energy resources which could be used as a weapon to play a key role in the European market. In addition, Russia has devised a plan to play a key role in transporting energy resources of Central Asia and Caspian Sea to European market through its territory. Moreover, Russia has recently been the moving spirit behind the idea of a Gas OPEC, an organization 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 together account for 60 per cent of global gas reserves, with Algeria, Venezuela and Central Asian gas exporting countries. Russia has swapped energy assets and developed joint upstream and downstream projects with all of these 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. This plan would offset Western efforts to control the energy markets. Russia is expected of using energy resources and arms export potentialities to project its influence across the world. Moreover, Russia defied U.S. efforts to isolate Iran by supplying $ 700 million worth of Tor M 1 advanced air – defence missile systems to Tehran in year 2006. It was the biggest of several defence contracts between Moscow and Tehran since 2000. Notwithstanding the nuclear controversy, Iran armed with Russian weapons and pursuing a common energy strategy may emerge as Russia’s strategic partner in West Asia.
The fifth chapter offers concluding observations, briefing and summarization of overall U.S. policy towards Afghanistan since pre-world war II up to the 11 September 2001.

The study used the descriptive method based on documentary analysis procedures. The study data is primarily based on books, journals, magazine, articles, newspapers and internet resources. Most of sources collected from Indian libraries such as Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) New Delhi, Jawahalal Nehru University New Delhi. Maulana Azad Library AMU, Aligarh, and Jamia Milia Islamia New Delhi.