



President Trump's Afghanistan Policy: An Assessment

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The uncertainty dominating the discourse on the United States (US) future policy towards Afghanistan, since President Donald Trump's inauguration in January 2017, has finally been addressed. After completing seven months in office, President Trump, on August 21, 2017, outlined his Administration's South Asia policy that highlighted the new strategy adopted by the US, with a focus on Afghanistan and linking its stability with that of the whole region.

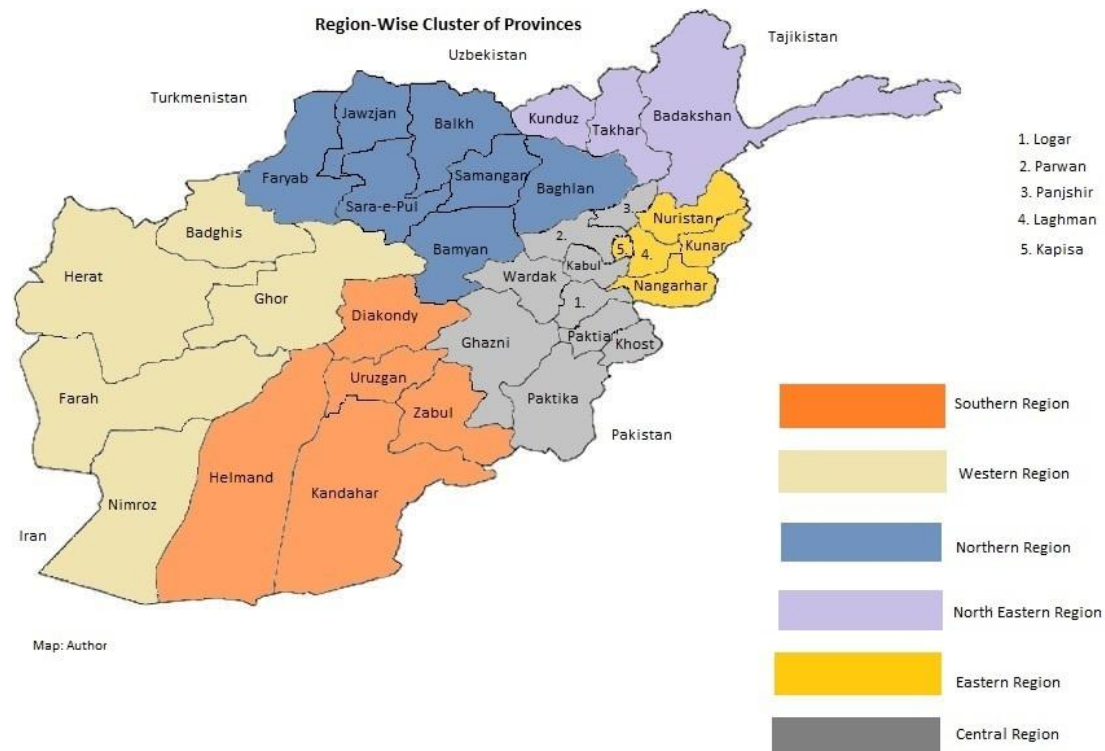
The much awaited policy on Afghanistan [See Annexure – I] has put to rest speculations regarding US involvement in Afghanistan. With more than USD 800 billion already spent in the country, Afghanistan remains America's longest war.¹ The US has lost more than 2,400 military personnel with another 20,000 been wounded fighting in Afghanistan since 2002.² The US-led 'war on terror' that was launched in the aftermath of the 9/11 has not been able to achieve its objectives of dismantling terrorists and terror networks from Afghanistan. Rather, there has been an increase in the number of terror attacks in the country, particularly since the drawdown of ISAF troops in 2014.

Significantly, former President Barack Obama had pledged to withdraw the remaining troops before the end of his tenure but he changed his decision owing to the resurgence of the Taliban. This situation of Taliban resurgence in October 2015 prompted him to announce that at least 5,500 US troops would remain in Afghanistan through 2016.³ By July 2016, Obama had decided to leave 8,400 troops in Afghanistan through the end of his Presidency.⁴

With no time-frame for a possible solution on talks with various centres of power in Afghanistan in sight and increasing terror attacks in the country by Taliban, ISIS and other terror groups, the security situation remains fragile with gradual deterioration since 2013. Several high-profile attacks, including on the Afghan National Army's 209 Shaheen Corps Headquarters in Balkh province and multiple attacks in Kabul, in last six months is a testimony to the security challenge Afghanistan faces. Although Taliban has not been able to take control of cities, but it has demonstrated an ability to take over districts.

Incidentally, in July 2017, Taliban had taken control of three districts of Paktia, Faryab and Ghor provinces⁵ that are located in three different regions of the country. While Paktia lies in the Central region, Faryab and Ghor are located in the Northern and Western regions respectively.

[See map below]



According to a media report, quoting data provided by Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) in July 2017, Taliban controls or dominates 48 administrative areas, the most they have held since their ouster from power in 2001.⁶ Taliban's control over significant portions indicate its growing power across the country. What has added to the

growing insecurity in Afghanistan is the ISIS, which has been making its presence felt beyond the eastern province of Nangarhar.

The United States Afghan Assessment

President Trump's position, prior to becoming the President, was contrary to President Obama's Afghan policy. Therefore, it was speculated that a change of guard in White House might also change the US strategy on Afghanistan. Mr. Trump was vociferous in his demand for troop withdrawal from Afghanistan as early as 2011 and continued that push as a presidential candidate.⁷ In one of his tweets on October 7, 2011, Mr. Trump had questioned continued US engagement in Afghanistan saying that, "When will we stop wasting our money on rebuilding Afghanistan? We must rebuild our country first".⁸ Although his opposition to US engagement in Afghanistan was unambiguous as a private citizen but, in the run up to presidential election Mr. Trump changed his view when he stated that invading Afghanistan in 2001 was a "terrible mistake," but he added US troops need to stay in order to avoid a collapse of the government.⁹

In continuation with Obama policy, the Trump Administration has also made it clear that "the primary objective of the US is to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a safe haven for terrorists to again attack the United States and its Allies."¹⁰ The US policy to protect the 'homeland' was previously stressed by General John W. Nicholson, the Commander of the US and NATO troops in Afghanistan, on February 9, 2017. In his statement to the Senate Armed Services Committee he had stated, "Out of the 98 US - designated terrorist organizations globally, 20 are based in the Afghanistan - Pakistan region".¹¹ In this context, General Nicholson had pointed out the need to increase US troops in Afghanistan.

This region appears to be the epicentre of terror activities across the world. Any attempt to lower the numerical strength of the troops in Afghanistan would undoubtedly boost the morale and influence of terrorist outfits like the Taliban and ISIS. Given this background, it was expected that the Trump Administration would not be withdrawing troops from Afghanistan, thus serving as a deterrent to expansion of terrorist outfits.

Trump Administration and its Afghanistan Policy

On June 13, 2017, Defense Secretary James Mattis was authorised to determine the troop level in Afghanistan.¹² This came as a follow up to his visit and NSA H. R. McMaster's visit to Afghanistan

in April 2017 to assess the ground situation. That possibly helped Trump to streamline his policy on Afghanistan which appears to be in continuation with the previous US policy in that country. Later, on August 15, 2017, Secretary Mattis during a press conference had said that all options, including full withdrawal from Afghanistan, were on the table,¹³ signifying Trump administration's dilemma over the course of action to be taken in Afghanistan. However, the recent announcement of Afghanistan policy by President Trump reaffirms Washington's renewed commitment to remain engaged in Afghanistan.

In his address, delivered from the Fort Myer military base in Arlington, Virginia, President Trump outlined his Administration's strategy to find a solution to the Afghan situation. In his speech, President Trump justified his strategy to remain engaged in Afghanistan saying that his, "original instinct was to pull out" before assuming office, but, it is different to arrive at a decision as the President of America, particularly on Afghanistan. Trump termed America's hasty withdrawal from Iraq as a mistake, which allowed terror outfits, including ISIS, to fill the vacuum.¹⁴ Repeating the Iraq mistake in Afghanistan, according to President Trump, has the potential to allow terrorists to flourish in the country. Linking the Afghan policy with South Asia, the US President said that there are 20 US-designated foreign terror organisations active in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as "Pakistan often gives safe haven to agents of chaos, violence and terror".¹⁵

President Trump clearly demarcated US interest in Afghanistan to stop resurgence of terror outfits in Afghanistan-Pakistan region that threaten America. He also expressed his apprehension regarding the safety of Pakistan's nuclear weapons in the wake of the spread of terror networks in the region,¹⁶ further committing to dismantling of terrorist networks and their funding channels.

What's New in the Policy?

Although the policy announcement was delayed, President Trump has followed the line of his senior military advisers to augment America's military role in Afghanistan. The new strategy has focused on three core elements that will decide the future of the country and the region. Firstly, the military campaign in Afghanistan gets a new dimension with a surge in troops. Secondly, the decision to not disclose the strength, deployment and eventual withdrawal of the troops; And

thirdly, asking Pakistan to abandon its policy of supporting terrorist outfits operating from its territory.

Defining the policy as a combination of diplomatic, economic and military efforts for a positive outcome, President Trump has kept the option of political reconciliation with Taliban open. Effective military efforts against Taliban and other terror outfits can place the National Unity Government (NUG) in a stronger position for future peace process, as and when it takes place. The other new element in this policy is that the onus of choosing the form of Government lies with the Afghans.

Interestingly, Trump's Afghan policy has brought India in its ambit. Praising India's contribution in Afghanistan's rebuilding and reconstruction, Trump urged India to play a greater role in providing economic assistance and support development initiatives in the country saying that "we want them to help us more with Afghanistan, especially in the area of economic assistance and development"⁷. Further, Trump spoke of developing US's strategic partnership with India as part of his South Asia policy saying that "Another critical part of the South Asia strategy for America is to further develop its strategic partnership with India -- the world's largest democracy and a key security and economic partner of the United States"⁸.

Condition-based Withdrawal

In a significant strategic shift of US engagement in Afghanistan, the new policy will pursue a conditions-based withdrawal, instead of time-based withdrawal that was being followed since 2001. Talking about the aim of the US forces in Afghanistan, President Trump said that the main objective of his policy is to fight the enemy and win saying that, "From now on, victory will have a clear definition: attacking our enemies, obliterating ISIS, crushing al Qaeda, preventing the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan, and stopping mass terror attacks against America before they emerge"⁹. The new Administration feels the previous policy of time-based withdrawal has been counter-productive for US and its allies in Afghanistan, as it pre-empt the enemy forces to plan and target Afghan, US and allies troops accordingly. Instead, conditions on the ground should be the guiding principle of troop's movement and other operational technicalities.

Pakistan's Role

One of the significant aspects of President Trump's new Afghan strategy is the approach to Pakistan. Realising Islamabad's support for terror elements on its territory in pursuing 'strategic depth', President Trump sent a clear message to Pakistan to "demonstrate its commitment to civilization, order, and to peace" and to stop "harbouring militants and terrorists who target U.S. service members and officials."²⁰ In this context, the US President was critical of Pakistan for following a dual policy of receiving generous financial aid from US and at the same time providing shelter to terror organisations fighting American forces in Afghanistan. Further, President Trump asked Pakistan to change its policy and contribute to peace and stability in the region. The US President said that "we can no longer be silent about Pakistan's safe havens for terrorist organisations, the Taliban and other groups that pose a threat to the region and beyond."²¹ Taking Pakistan head-on saying that, no partnership can survive if militants and terrorists who target the US service members find shelter in that country.

Message to Taliban

The resurgence of Taliban is mainly responsible for the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan. In a stern warning to terror groups operating in Afghanistan, the new strategy talks about dealing with enemy forces, including Taliban, militarily. President Trump said "...micromanagement from Washington D.C. does not win battles" ²² and hence the new Administration has lifted operational restrictions in the field that was imposed on the troops engaged in fighting insurgent groups in Afghanistan. This was in light of their experience in Mosul (Iraq) where lifting of operational restrictions brought about significant impact on the ground. The option of future political settlement with Taliban has been kept open. The policy talks about strengthening the military campaign targeting terror outfits, including Taliban. Trump's remarks outline the objective of the US military campaign, which is to win against ISIS, al Qaeda, Taliban and others.

International Reaction to the Policy

President Trump's policy on Afghanistan and South Asia has been received on expected lines by countries in the region and beyond. With some viewing it as a positive step, others have been critical of this decision. For instance, Russia and China expressed similar views expressing doubt

over the effectiveness of the new policy. While Pakistan has expressed its opposition to the new policy, UK, Germany, India and Afghanistan have supported the policy.

Russia: Moscow termed President Trump's new strategy as similar to the policy followed by President Obama which has failed to improve the situation in the region. Spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, said, "Regrettably, the strategy does not reflect the danger posed by the Afghan offshoot of the ISIS terrorist group, which is actively spreading its influence in Afghanistan, and completely ignores drug production in Afghanistan as well".²³ In her statement, she expressed the hope that the surge in US armed forces in Afghanistan "will not violate sovereignty of that country or infringe upon the national interests of the states in that region."²⁴

China: Expressing hope that the policy can be conducive to promoting the security and stability of Afghanistan and South Asia, China came to Pakistan's defence when spokeswoman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry Hua Chunying said that Pakistan was on the front line in the struggle against terrorism and had made "great sacrifices" and "important contributions" in the fight. "We believe that the international community should fully recognise Pakistan's anti-terrorism efforts."²⁵

Pakistan: The new Afghanistan and South Asia policy by US met with strong reaction from Pakistan. As a follow up to President Trump's new strategy, the Cabinet Meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on August 22, 2017, discussed Trump's Strategy on Afghanistan and South Asia. The Prime Minister was mandated to take up the issue in detail in the National Security Committee Meeting (NSC) that was scheduled for August 24, 2017.²⁶ The NSC in its meeting rejected Trump's policy statement and decided to contact other friendly countries and take all stakeholders into confidence regarding Pakistan's reservations over the new US policy.²⁷

Expressing its disappointment over the US Afghan policy, Pakistan's Foreign Office on August 22, 2017 rejected Donald Trump's allegations that Pakistan offers safe haven to "agents of chaos". In its response, it stated, "as a matter of policy, Pakistan does not allow use of its territory against any country. Instead of relying on the false narrative of safe havens, the US needs to work with Pakistan to eradicate terrorism."

The Foreign Office statement further stated that “No country in the world has suffered more than Pakistan from the scourge of terrorism, often perpetrated from outside our borders. It is, therefore disappointing that the US policy statement ignores the enormous sacrifices rendered by the Pakistani nation in this effort.”²⁸

As a mark of protest, the Foreign Minister Khwaja Asif delayed his planned trip to Washington to meet US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and instead, embarked on a three-nation trip China, Russia, and Turkey, presumably to garner diplomatic support in context to the Senate’s decision to coordinate a regional diplomatic initiative against US accusations.²⁹ On the other hand, the Lower House unanimously passed a resolution calling on the government to consider suspending supply lines to the US-led NATO mission in neighbouring Afghanistan.³⁰

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom welcomed President Trump's commitment to step up the military campaign in Afghanistan. “The US commitment is very welcome,” British Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said in a statement. “It’s in all our interests that Afghanistan becomes more prosperous and safer: that’s why we announced our own troop increase back in June”.³¹

Germany: Germany, which has about 980³² troops in the country as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission praised President Trump’s new Afghan Policy, however, would not be among the first nations to contribute more. German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen in her tweet said that “We increased our troop numbers by 18 percent last year when other countries were cutting theirs. So we don’t see ourselves in the front row of people who should be asked for more”.³³

India: India, which has been playing a major role in the reconstruction of the war-ravaged country, has reaffirmed its commitment to support the Government and the people of Afghanistan in their efforts to bring peace, security, stability and prosperity in their country. India positively received Trump’s determination to enhance efforts to overcome the challenges facing Afghanistan and confronting issues of safe havens and other forms of cross-border support enjoyed by terrorists.³⁴

Afghanistan: The new policy was welcomed by both the leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG). President Ashraf Ghani in his response said, “I am grateful to President Trump and the American people for this affirmation of support for our efforts to achieve self-reliance and for our joint struggle to rid the region from the threat of terrorism.”³⁵ Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, while praising the strategy said that the renewed commitment of the United States to Afghanistan and its people is a unique opportunity to tackle terrorists and achieve peace in the country.³⁶

NATO: The Secretary-General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, welcomed President Trump's conditions-based approach to Afghanistan and the region.³⁷ Supporting President Trump's views on terror safe havens in the region, Secretary General Stoltenberg said: “We urge all countries in the region to do their utmost to shut down sanctuaries for extremist groups, support peace and reconciliation, and contribute to a stable and secure Afghanistan.”³⁸ “More than 15 nations have pledged additional contributions to the Resolute Support Mission in recent weeks”, said Stoltenberg.³⁹

Assessment

Although the Afghan policy has created a sense of optimism among the Afghans and coalition forces engaged in fighting the insurgent groups, countries in the region must come up with a solution that can supplement the military action with a political solution to the problem. The policy is expected to rejuvenate the fight against terrorists and insurgent groups that are active in the country. It remains to be seen how a few thousand more troops can tackle the resurgent Taliban and the expanding ISIS and other terror outfits when more than one hundred thousand foreign forces failed to dismantle the terror networks in the country. Importantly, Pakistan's cooperation is essential to find a lasting solution to Afghan problem. However, two key issues raised by President Trump remain unanswered;

- What options will the US have in case Pakistan fails to comply with the policy prescribed by President Trump?
- What is the fallback option for US, NATO and its allies in case Pakistan blocks vital lines of communication for the troops in Pakistan?

President Trump's policy has attempted to correct the prevailing official American narrative on Pakistan, a country that has for long benefited from US financial largesse while continuing to undermine US objectives in the region. The US has realised that Pakistan is both a part of the problem as well as the solution as outfits like Taliban and Haqqani Network are based in that country. Washington cannot afford to ignore Islamabad's continuing duplicity on 'war on terror' at a time when terror attacks in Afghanistan are increasing. However, what needs to be seen is whether Pakistan will give up its reliance on terrorist outfits to further its proxy wars in neighbouring countries.

Apart from the external threat faced by Afghanistan, the country continues to face a more potent threat within, which is the Taliban. Reacting to Trump's policy and sensing a tough challenge in its pursuit for capturing new territories, Taliban termed the new policy as "wasting American soldiers' life." Dismissing President Trump's strategy as vague and offering "nothing new", Taliban threatened by saying, "Afghanistan would become a graveyard for the US."⁴⁰

Although committing to pursue US's shared objectives for peace and security in South Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region, Trump's speech has not mentioned other regional stakeholders, including Russia, China, Iran and the Central Asian states. While President Trump's conditions-based approach provides a new hope to deal with the situation in Afghanistan, the dual threat – within and without – looms large and poses serious challenges to the renewed spur to the 'war on terror.'

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.

End Notes

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Annexure - I

August 21, 2017

Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia

Fort Myer
Arlington, Virginia
9:02 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Thank you. Please be seated.

Vice President Pence, Secretary of State Tillerson, members of the Cabinet, General Dunford, Deputy Secretary Shanahan, and Colonel Duggan. Most especially, thank you to the men and women of Fort Myer and every member of the United States military at home and abroad.

We send our thoughts and prayers to the families of our brave sailors who were injured and lost after a tragic collision at sea, as well as to those conducting the search and recovery efforts.

I am here tonight to lay out our path forward in Afghanistan and South Asia. But before I provide the details of our new strategy, I want to say a few words to the servicemembers here with us tonight, to those watching from their posts, and to all Americans listening at home.

Since the founding of our republic, our country has produced a special class of heroes whose selflessness, courage, and resolve is unmatched in human history.

American patriots from every generation have given their last breath on the battlefield for our nation and for our freedom. Through their lives -- and though their lives were cut short, in their deeds they achieved total immortality.

By following the heroic example of those who fought to preserve our republic, we can find the inspiration our country needs to unify, to heal, and to remain one nation under God. The men and women of our military operate as one team, with one shared mission, and one shared sense of purpose.

They transcend every line of race, ethnicity, creed, and color to serve together -- and sacrifice together -- in absolutely perfect cohesion. That is because all servicemembers are brothers and sisters. They're all part of the same family; it's called the American family. They take the same oath, fight for the same flag, and live according to the same law. They are bound together by common purpose, mutual trust, and selfless devotion to our nation and to each other.

The soldier understands what we, as a nation, too often forget that a wound inflicted upon a single member of our community is a wound inflicted upon us all. When one part of America hurts, we all hurt. And when one citizen suffers an injustice, we all suffer together.

Loyalty to our nation demands loyalty to one another. Love for America requires love for all of its people. When we open our hearts to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice, no place for bigotry, and no tolerance for hate.

The young men and women we send to fight our wars abroad deserve to return to a country that is not at war with itself at home. We cannot remain a force for peace in the world if we are not at peace with each other.

As we send our bravest to defeat our enemies overseas -- and we will always win -- let us find the courage to heal our divisions within. Let us make a simple promise to the men and women we ask to fight in our name that, when they return home from battle, they will find a country that has renewed the sacred bonds of love and loyalty that unite us together as one.

Thanks to the vigilance and skill of the American military and of our many allies throughout the world, horrors on the scale of September 11th -- and nobody can ever forget that -- have not been repeated on our shores.

But we must also acknowledge the reality I am here to talk about tonight: that nearly 16 years after September 11th attacks, after the extraordinary sacrifice of blood and treasure, the American people are weary of war without victory. Nowhere is this more evident than with the war in Afghanistan, the longest war in American history -- 17 years.

I share the American people's frustration. I also share their frustration over a foreign policy that has spent too much time, energy, money, and most importantly lives, trying to rebuild countries in our own image, instead of pursuing our security interests above all other considerations.

That is why, shortly after my inauguration, I directed Secretary of Defense Mattis and my national security team to undertake a comprehensive review of all strategic options in Afghanistan and South Asia.

My original instinct was to pull out -- and, historically, I like following my instincts. But all my life I've heard that decisions are much different when you sit behind the desk in the Oval Office; in other words, when you're President of the United States. So I studied Afghanistan in great detail and from every conceivable angle. After many meetings, over many months, we held our final meeting last Friday at Camp David, with my Cabinet and generals, to complete our strategy. I arrived at three fundamental conclusions about America's core interests in Afghanistan.

First, our nation must seek an honorable and enduring outcome worthy of the tremendous sacrifices that have been made, especially the sacrifices of lives. The men and women who serve our nation in combat deserve a plan for victory. They deserve the tools they need, and the trust they have earned, to fight and to win.

Second, the consequences of a rapid exit are both predictable and unacceptable. 9/11, the worst terrorist attack in our history, was planned and directed from Afghanistan because that country was ruled by a government that gave comfort and shelter to terrorists. A hasty withdrawal would create a vacuum that terrorists, including ISIS and al Qaeda, would instantly fill, just as happened before September 11th.

And, as we know, in 2011, America hastily and mistakenly withdrew from Iraq. As a result, our hard-won gains slipped back into the hands of terrorist enemies. Our soldiers watched as cities they had fought for, and bled to liberate, and won, were occupied by a terrorist group called ISIS. The vacuum we created by leaving too soon gave safe haven for ISIS to spread, to grow, recruit, and launch attacks. We cannot repeat in Afghanistan the mistake our leaders made in Iraq.

Third and finally, I concluded that the security threats we face in Afghanistan and the broader region are immense. Today, 20 U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations are active in Afghanistan and Pakistan -- the highest concentration in any region anywhere in the world.

For its part, Pakistan often gives safe haven to agents of chaos, violence, and terror. The threat is worse because Pakistan and India are two nuclear-armed states whose tense relations threaten to spiral into conflict. And that could happen.

No one denies that we have inherited a challenging and troubling situation in Afghanistan and South Asia, but we do not have the luxury of going back in time and making different or better decisions. When I became President, I was given a bad and very complex hand, but I fully knew what I was getting into: big and intricate problems. But, one way or another, these problems will be solved -- I'm a problem solver -- and, in the end, we will win.

We must address the reality of the world as it exists right now -- the threats we face, and the confronting of all of the problems of today, and extremely predictable consequences of a hasty withdrawal.

We need look no further than last week's vile, vicious attack in Barcelona to understand that terror groups will stop at nothing to commit the mass murder of innocent men, women and children. You saw it for yourself. Horrible.

As I outlined in my speech in Saudi Arabia three months ago, America and our partners are committed to stripping terrorists of their territory, cutting off their funding, and exposing the false allure of their evil ideology.

Terrorists who slaughter innocent people will find no glory in this life or the next. They are nothing but thugs, and criminals, and predators, and -- that's right -- losers. Working alongside our allies, we will break their will, dry up their recruitment, keep them from crossing our borders, and yes, we will defeat them, and we will defeat them handily.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, America's interests are clear: We must stop the resurgence of safe havens that enable terrorists to threaten America, and we must prevent nuclear weapons and materials from coming into the hands of terrorists and being used against us, or anywhere in the world for that matter.

But to prosecute this war, we will learn from history. As a result of our comprehensive review, American strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia will change dramatically in the following ways:

A core pillar of our new strategy is a shift from a time-based approach to one based on conditions. I've said it many times how counterproductive it is for the United States to announce in advance the dates we intend to begin, or end, military options. We will not talk about numbers of troops or our plans for further military activities.

Conditions on the ground -- not arbitrary timetables -- will guide our strategy from now on. America's enemies must never know our plans or believe they can wait us out. I will not say when we are going to attack, but attack we will.

Another fundamental pillar of our new strategy is the integration of all instruments of American power -- diplomatic, economic, and military -- toward a successful outcome.

Someday, after an effective military effort, perhaps it will be possible to have a political settlement that includes elements of the Taliban in Afghanistan, but nobody knows if or when that will ever happen. America will continue its support for the Afghan government and the Afghan military as they confront the Taliban in the field.

Ultimately, it is up to the people of Afghanistan to take ownership of their future, to govern their society, and to achieve an everlasting peace. We are a partner and a friend, but we will not dictate to the Afghan people how to live, or how to govern their own complex society. We are not nation-building again. We are killing terrorists.

The next pillar of our new strategy is to change the approach and how to deal with Pakistan. We can no longer be silent about Pakistan's safe havens for terrorist organizations, the Taliban, and other groups that pose a threat to the region and beyond. Pakistan has much to gain from partnering with our effort in Afghanistan. It has much to lose by continuing to harbor criminals and terrorists.

In the past, Pakistan has been a valued partner. Our militaries have worked together against common enemies. The Pakistani people have suffered greatly from terrorism and extremism. We recognize those contributions and those sacrifices.

But Pakistan has also sheltered the same organizations that try every single day to kill our people. We have been paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars at the same time they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting. But that will have to change, and that will change immediately. No partnership can survive a country's harboring of militants and terrorists who target U.S. servicemembers and officials. It is time for Pakistan to demonstrate its commitment to civilization, order, and to peace.

Another critical part of the South Asia strategy for America is to further develop its strategic partnership with India -- the world's largest democracy and a key security and economic partner of the United States. We appreciate India's important contributions to stability in Afghanistan, but India makes billions of dollars in trade with the United States, and we want them to help us more with Afghanistan, especially in the area of economic assistance and development. We are committed to pursuing our shared objectives for peace and security in South Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

Finally, my administration will ensure that you, the brave defenders of the American people, will have the necessary tools and rules of engagement to make this strategy work, and work effectively and work quickly.

I have already lifted restrictions the previous administration placed on our warfighters that prevented the Secretary of Defense and our commanders in the field from fully and swiftly waging battle against the enemy. Micromanagement from Washington, D.C. does not win battles. They are won in the field drawing upon the judgment and expertise of wartime commanders and frontline soldiers acting in real time, with real authority, and with a clear mission to defeat the enemy.

That's why we will also expand authority for American armed forces to target the terrorist and criminal networks that sow violence and chaos throughout Afghanistan. These killers need to know they have nowhere to hide; that no place is beyond the reach of American might and Americans arms. Retribution will be fast and powerful.

As we lift restrictions and expand authorities in the field, we are already seeing dramatic results in the campaign to defeat ISIS, including the liberation of Mosul in Iraq.

Since my inauguration, we have achieved record-breaking success in that regard. We will also maximize sanctions and other financial and law enforcement actions against these networks to eliminate their ability to export terror. When America commits its warriors to battle, we must ensure they have every weapon to apply swift, decisive, and overwhelming force.

Our troops will fight to win. We will fight to win. From now on, victory will have a clear definition: attacking our enemies, obliterating ISIS, crushing al Qaeda, preventing the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan, and stopping mass terror attacks against America before they emerge.

We will ask our NATO allies and global partners to support our new strategy with additional troop and funding increases in line with our own. We are confident they will. Since taking office, I have made clear that our allies and partners must contribute much more money to our collective defense, and they have done so.

In this struggle, the heaviest burden will continue to be borne by the good people of Afghanistan and their courageous armed forces. As the prime minister of Afghanistan has promised, we are going to participate in economic development to help defray the cost of this war to us.

Afghanistan is fighting to defend and secure their country against the same enemies who threaten us. The stronger the Afghan security forces become, the less we will have to do. Afghans will secure and build their own nation and define their own future. We want them to succeed.

But we will no longer use American military might to construct democracies in faraway lands, or try to rebuild other countries in our own image. Those days are now over. Instead, we will work with allies and partners to protect our shared interests. We are not asking others to change their way of life, but to pursue common goals that allow our children to live better and safer lives. This principled realism will guide our decisions moving forward.

Military power alone will not bring peace to Afghanistan or stop the terrorist threat arising in that country. But strategically applied force aims to create the conditions for a political process to achieve a lasting peace.

America will work with the Afghan government as long as we see determination and progress. However, our commitment is not unlimited, and our support is not a blank check. The government of Afghanistan must carry their share of the military, political, and economic burden. The American people expect to see real reforms, real progress, and real results. Our patience is not unlimited. We will keep our eyes wide open.

In abiding by the oath I took on January 20th, I will remain steadfast in protecting American lives and American interests. In this effort, we will make common cause with any nation that chooses to stand and fight alongside us against this global threat. Terrorists take heed: America will never let up until you are dealt a lasting defeat.

Under my administration, many billions of dollars more is being spent on our military. And this includes vast amounts being spent on our nuclear arsenal and missile defense.

In every generation, we have faced down evil, and we have always prevailed. We prevailed because we know who we are and what we are fighting for.

Not far from where we are gathered tonight, hundreds of thousands of America's greatest patriots lay in eternal rest at Arlington National Cemetery. There is more courage, sacrifice, and love in those hallowed grounds than in any other spot on the face of the Earth.

Many of those who have fought and died in Afghanistan enlisted in the months after September 11th, 2001. They volunteered for a simple reason: They loved America, and they were determined to protect her.

Now we must secure the cause for which they gave their lives. We must unite to defend America from its enemies abroad. We must restore the bonds of loyalty among our citizens at home, and we must achieve an honorable and enduring outcome worthy of the enormous price that so many have paid.

Our actions, and in the months to come, all of them will honor the sacrifice of every fallen hero, every family who lost a loved one, and every wounded warrior who shed their blood in defense of our great nation. With our resolve, we will ensure that your service and that your families will bring about the defeat of our enemies and the arrival of peace.

We will push onward to victory with power in our hearts, courage in our souls, and everlasting pride in each and every one of you.

Thank you. May God bless our military. And may God bless the United States of America. Thank you very much. Thank you. (Applause.)

END

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