

Afghan Endgames: Strategy and Policy Choices for America's Longest War, edited by Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2013, pp. 244, INR 895

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This book has been published at a critical juncture: the United States (US) and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies are preparing to wind up their combat mission in Afghanistan by the end of 2014 and are engaged in charting out the best possible exit strategy. The US and its NATO allies, along with regional nations around Afghanistan, are deliberating over the best possible way to deal with the Afghan situation after 2014. The current strategic scenario thus makes this book very relevant and significant for leaders, policymakers, researchers as well as for the common public interested in developments in Afghanistan.

The authors in this edited book belong to various disciplines and backgrounds such as international relations, strategy and communication, history, anthropology and ethics. Their multi-disciplinary background and expertise has helped in developing a deep analysis of the existing Afghan situation. It also works in recommending to the United States and its allies the best possible strategies for withdrawal from Afghanistan as well as the future prospects of peace, stability and progress in that war-torn nation after 2014.

This book seeks to examine and understand the various strategic options for the US and its allies in Afghanistan so that the emerging scenarios in Afghanistan, in years to come, can be handled efficiently

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and effectively. In this regard, the contributors in this book have made excellent attempts to analyse and describe the prospects for peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. They have also attempted to provide the best policy options and their recommendations for the US in Afghanistan. The edited volume has been divided into four parts, namely, overview, strategic alternatives, other perspectives and conclusion, and contains 12 chapters written by various experts.

The first part of the book contains four chapters. This part describes various historical, cultural and operational perspectives and has attempted to come out with new insights. In the introductory chapter, Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, who are also editors of this book, highlight the various challenges Afghanistan poses for the US and its allies and partners as well as for the international community in years to follow. Since there is going to be an uncertain situation for the US and its allies with regard to Afghanistan, it becomes essential for various actors engaged there to debate and deliberate and evolve various strategies and policy options for successfully dealing with future situations.

Victor Davis Hanson disapproves the viewpoint that Afghanistan is the 'graveyard of empires'. He notes that in ancient times Alexander conquered and occupied Afghanistan, and that this territory very much remained under the Greek rule for more than 200 years. In this regard, he has discussed the Greek concepts of operations, which could be relevant and applicable in the current context as well.

Thomas Barfield provides social and cultural perspectives on the current conflict in Afghanistan. He deliberates upon the great game played between Russia and Britain in Central Asia; as a result, Afghanistan became a buffer between the two empires. He argues that the preference for religious rule among Afghans as well as a social preference for any other option than a strong central government should be understood by policymakers in the US. He cautions that the US' efforts for centralization in Afghanistan could be counterproductive.

Hy Rothstein presents an operational evaluation and insight of the war in Afghanistan based on his observations of the war over the last decade. He notes that given the existing conditions and likely scenarios in Afghanistan and the US, it is essential to have a different plan in order to sustain the positive results which have been achieved with great costs.

The second section of the book includes four chapters focussing on the range of strategic options currently available in the Afghan war. Andrew Bacevich attempts to place Afghanistan in the overall American

national security strategy as well as foreign policy. Bacevich argues that despite the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the Taliban yet to be completely defeated, America's greater goal of effectively preventing the rise of terror networks could still be achieved. He makes the point that Soviet Union remained engaged in Afghanistan for too long, as a result of which it suffered disastrous consequences. He points out that those great powers who withdrew from any such endless commitments have prospered and gained.

In his chapter, Frederick Kagan provides a counter view to Bacevich's arguments. Kagan comes up with his assessment of what would be essential to accomplish a desirable outcome: that of establishing a strong, legitimate central government in Afghanistan, which has suffered a long war and is now making efforts to come out of it.

In the next chapter, Edward Luttwak takes a middle ground between the views of Bacevich and Kagan. Luttwak presents a pointed assessment of the existing Afghan strategy. He attempts to construct and employ a form of strategic leverage which would encourage China, India, Iran and Russia to engage in Afghanistan more actively and effectively, ultimately helping in the stabilization of Afghanistan after the withdrawal of foreign forces. He argues that after the withdrawal, the US contribution should be limited to developing a plan and providing assistance in its execution through its advisors. This would require only a small US force structure and resources in Afghanistan. He also argues for cultivating tribal allies who could provide effective leadership in stabilization efforts in times to come.

This part concludes with the chapter by Scott Gartner and Leo Blanken in which they deliberate upon a sustainable Afghan security structure. In this security architecture, the authors contemplate a scenario in which violence occurs regularly but, at the same time, a societal security structure emerges that helps in an orderly equilibrium to re-emerge after each bout of conflicting situations.

The third part of this book has three chapters and this section attempts to look at and understand Afghanistan through the prism of ethics, strategic communication and civil society. Efforts have been made to synthesize the various views and perspectives aimed at providing a multifaceted approach for an end game in Afghanistan. In his chapter, Russell Muirhead discusses how significant the ethical concept of 'post-war justice' is for the endgame on Afghanistan, other than fighting a just war or justice of cause in Afghanistan. Muirhead argues that for post-war

justice, it imperative for the US and its allies to do their best to establish a legitimate state before their withdrawal.

Robert Reilly discusses various concepts in his analysis of the Afghan war. He deliberates upon how the differing end states focused upon the legitimacy and centrality effect the US information and communication strategies in Afghanistan.

Jade Rodriguez and Rebecca Lorentz seek to understand the role of civil society, non-governmental organizations, and also the influence of uncivil society, criminal networks. The authors consider Taliban as well through this method of analysis.

In the concluding chapter, John Arquilla and Hy Rothstein provide their overall assessment of various strategic options relating to the Afghan conflict. According to Arquilla and Rothstein, in view of uncertainties ahead for the US and its allies vis-à-vis Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is essential to have vigorous debate on various alternative strategies. Also, the authors believe that strategic adjustment would be vital in view of existing domestic, political, regional and international realities. This makes it imperative for the leaders and policymakers in the US, and those among its allies, to deeply ponder over various strategic alternatives along with their costs and risks. Given the relevance and significance of this subject, this book would be an insightful study material for leaders and policymakers engaged in decision-making process in the US and elsewhere as well as for researchers and individuals interested in the subject.