

A CONFIDENT EXIT FROM AFGHANISTAN

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

Contrary to popular belief, the U.S. is not getting out of Afghanistan a defeated nation. It stayed there as long as it needed to, as President Joe Biden stated, achieving its objective “to degrade the terrorist threat to keep Afghanistan from becoming a base from which attacks could be continued against the United States.”

The U.S.'s exit from Afghanistan represents a fundamental shift in its strategic objectives. As Vanda Felbab-Brown observes in her blog dated April 15, 2021 in *Brookings Institution*, the U.S.'s decision is the right one. It is time for it to move on and focus on more important strategic priorities such as “threats from China, an aggressive Russia, North Korea, and Iran — as well as zoonotic pandemics”.

By exiting Afghanistan, the U.S. has left the problem of containing what remains of the Taliban's brand of Islamic fundamentalism to its concerned neighbours. The most aggrieved by this exit will be the Afghans who, after enduring 20 years of conflict, were looking forward to better times, but are instead being abandoned by the U.S. This is what happened to the South Vietnamese when the U.S. withdrew from the Vietnam war in 1973. The U.S.'s seemingly messy exit then concealed a victory against global communism that two shrewd and ruthless men — President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger — conjured in just under four years between 1969 and 1973.

At the start of the big U.S. engagement in Vietnam following the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution passed by the U.S. Congress in August 1964, which authorised the President to deploy armed forces in Southeast Asia, there was a real fear among Americans that revolutionary communism, spearheaded by the Soviet Union and China, would take over one country after another in Asia and that Vietnam would be one more country to fall if not checked.

Fortunately for Nixon, soon after becoming the American President in 1969, the ideological differences between the Soviet Union and China came out in the open and led to a border dispute. It is here that Nixon saw his chance to drive them further apart by reaching out to China through Romania and Pakistan.

In her 2005 paper, ‘Nixon, Kissinger, and the “Soviet Card” in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971-1974,’ Evelyn Goh, citing declassified documents, wrote about how the U.S. Secretary of State and National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, in his first secret trip to Beijing in July 1971, assured Premier Zhou Enlai that the U.S. government “would gradually withdraw U.S. troops as the war in Vietnam ended and as relations with China improved”. The paper was published in the official journal of Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, *Diplomatic History*.

Following up on Kissinger's secret visit to China, Nixon went there in 1972 on his much publicised ‘the week that changed the world’ tour paving the way for a ‘safe’ U.S. exit from Vietnam in 1973. This was no small victory for Nixon. With China almost wholly on his side, the U.S.'s principal enemy, the Soviet Union, stood alone. This practically eliminated American fears of communism overrunning the world or of Vietnam falling into communist hands.

Something similar has happened in Afghanistan. With the kind of surveillance that the U.S. and its allies are able to mount on countries and individuals today, it is unlikely that the Taliban will, even if they wrest control of Afghanistan, be in a position to nurture another terrorist like Osama Bin Laden, as they have been accused of doing. It is this confidence, not frustration, that has

enabled Mr. Biden to announce American military disengagement in Afghanistan.

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To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

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