



# TRUMP'S AFGHAN POLICY: WHAT DOES IT IMPLY FOR AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN AND INDIA



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President Trump's announcement of Afghanistan policy on August 21 generated varied reactions in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The announcement (Full Transcript–*The Atlantic*) indeed is a deviation from Trump's stance as a private citizen when he supported complete U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. US has been engaged in an endless war in Afghanistan for the last 17 years – the longest war in American history. Trump himself agreed in his announcement that the “American people are weary of war without victory”.

The latest Afghan policy created ample uproar in Pakistan for obvious reasons and the Pakistan policy makers reacted strongly to the US accusation regarding Islamabad harboring militants.

The core pillar of the policy is a “condition based approach” and not a “time –based approach”. US has decided to send nearly 4,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. Conditions on the ground would determine the US withdrawal and not “arbitrary timetables” as Trump termed it. The initial policy by Obama which set the timeline for US withdrawal was rejected by Trump.

The second pillar of the policy is “the integration of all instruments of American power—diplomatic, economic, and military—towards a successful outcome”. According to Trump, US does not intend to extend its role in nation building and it is the responsibility of the Afghans to take “ownership of their future”. US would continue its support and assistance to the Afghan government and the military to deal with Taliban.

The third pillar of the policy is how US would deal with Pakistan. Trump, in his blunt message to Pakistan, clearly stated that the US can no longer be silent on Pakistan's open support to Taliban and other terrorist groups which threaten regional security. Also, Washington has no intention to continue US financial aid and assistance to Pakistan. Trump said:

“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 Pakistanis have suffered greatly from terrorism and extremism. We recognize those contributions and those sacrifices. But Pakistan has also sheltered the same organisations that try every single day to kill our people.”

The fourth pillar of the policy is development of America's strategic partnership with India. Trump *recognised* India's contributions to the stability of Afghanistan and urged for India's extended economic and development assistance in Afghanistan.

This latest Afghanistan policy is certainly a deviation from US posturing of the past. The policy is symbolic of the US intentions of continued presence in Afghanistan till the situation stabilises. Some bigger questions remain to be answered: Whether sheer US presence with an extended number of troops is expected to bring stability in the region? What are an extra 4000 troops going to do that 100,000 troops couldn't do in 2011? What does the President mean by “conditions on the ground”?

Afghan President Ghani has welcomed Trump's announcement as it projects US continued support. Ghani seems to be happy with the additional number of troops which he feels would assist Afghanistan to counter Taliban. The US stance on Pakistan has definitely given more comfort to Afghans who have perpetually blamed Pakistan for instability in Afghanistan. However, there have been mixed reactions on the outcome of the US extended presence as a few sections of the society feel it would lead to a surge in deadly attacks from the Taliban. Also, Afghans fear rise of corruption and unemployment within the society. The Trump policy certainly symbolizes US continued support to the Afghan government but whether this would actually deter Taliban and stabilise the security situation seems unlikely.

Pakistan has been infuriated and has hit back on the US statement of Pakistan harboring the militants in Afghanistan. *Al Jazeera* reported, Pakistan Army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa, during a meeting with David Hale, US ambassador to Pakistan, as saying, “We are not looking for any material or financial assistance....but trust, understanding and acknowledgement of our contributions”. Trump's announcement does outline Washington's intent of cutting down

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of the US assistance to Pakistan. Islamabad has received lavish American financial and military assistance amounting to approximately \$33 billion during 2002-2017. However, there has been a visible decline in US assistance post Osama's killing in 2011. Trump administration took a firm stance and has slashed its foreign military financing (FMF) to Pakistan from US\$ 255 million to US\$ 100 million.

Islamabad has reacted strongly to Trump's statements regarding Pakistan's support to terrorist organisations. However, it seems to be less worried than before about US military and financial support. China's all out support to Pakistan, which has expanded from a pure military and strategic support to economic and diplomatic, has given ample confidence to Islamabad. Pakistan no more feels threatened with the loss of US support. Trump's policy could be viewed as adding further pressure on Pakistan but, whether this would actually change Islamabad's calculus, is highly unlikely.

India has applauded Trump's policy on Afghanistan and the Indian Ministry of External Affairs said it welcomed US "determination to enhance efforts to overcome the challenges faced by Afghanistan and in confronting issues of safe havens and other forms of cross-border support enjoyed by terrorists." India has been dealing with Pakistan's covert war and its strategy of employing terror as a foreign policy tool for more than four decades now. Mounting international pressure on Pakistan to alter its strategic choices does work in India's favour. India has been engaged in Afghanistan and has committed to invest \$2 billion in development assistance. India is one of the leading donors in Afghanistan and by far the largest regional donor. Obviously India's role has been constrained given the circumstances and Pakistan's continuous unhappiness over Indian presence as well as soft power enhancement in Kabul.

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