

Review of: "American Mission in Afghanistan: Geopolitical Interests, Strategies and Reasons of Failure"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Review

American Mission in Afghanistan: Geopolitical Interests, Strategies and Reasons of [for] Failure

The article is an interesting read. The author has tried to explain the issue both historically as well as geographically. The author has shed a great deal of light on the role US in the politics in and around Afghanistan and Central Asia, and how regional powers have resisted the US effort to establish its foothold in the energy-rich region. There is also an in-depth discussion around the US policy approach— from bringing the Al-Qaida leadership to justice to state and/or nation building in Afghanistan— during the past three US administrations. The author has also covered the role of internal ethnic and tribal differences and their role in the post-9/11 insurgency in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, the article would read much better if the following changes are made to it:

The argument is not clear. Does the author argue in the article that US geopolitical interests in Central Asia (CA) played a role in the US attack on Afghanistan and the onset of the War on Terror— and that 9/11 and the presence of Al-Qaida in Afghanistan provided the much-needed reason for pursuing US interest in CA? The second layer of confusion is whether Afghanistan was central to US policy after 9/11 or Central Asia. For example, the abstract starts with “Afghanistan was considered a bridge to American geopolitical interests in Central Asia” and then in the introduction, the author asserts that “in the post-Soviet era, wielding sufficient influence in Afghanistan was considered vital to American strategic ambitions for multiple reasons.” And the title of the article is “American Mission in Afghanistan...” A little clarity in the argument is, therefore, a must so that the reader can follow the discussion around the issue— American Mission in Afghanistan.

One additional thing here, the title needs correcting. It needs to be reasons for, not reasons of, failure, in the title. The title will read like this:

American Missions in Afghanistan: Geopolitical Interests, Strategies, and Reasons for Failure

There is a little conspiratorial tinge in the article. The author observes that “the “doctrine of Enlargement” was developed by Lake to spread American influence to the areas of strategic importance” (Lake, 2009), while the full name of the doctrine was “democratic enlargement” that Clinton hoped he would be remembered “as the free trade president and the leading architect of a new world economic order.” What the author implies is something like NATO expansion or enlargement, rather than democratic enlargement with free market economy as the mainstay of the doctrine.

The author makes a big jump from the politics of the 1990s to 2008 and then back to the early 2000s (pp.6-8).

Also, gloss abbreviations such IPI (page 9).

The author can make a little more effort to connect the various sections in a logical manner in order to make it a more coherent article.

The author has synonymised Pashtuns with Taliban (pp.12-13). He asserts on p.14: “Many Afghans placed nationalism above all other ideas and ideologies, and to uphold national pride and honor people rose above ideologies and ambitions to bring territorial incursions of British and Russian Empires.” He has not demonstrated the nationalist nature of the Taliban movement— a Deobandi religious movement. There is little evidence that suggests that it was Afghan nationalism that sustained the Taliban’s post-2001 insurgency. Do the Taliban recognise the national flag and anthem of Afghanistan? Do they believe in the history of Afghanistan or they try to supplant it with Islamic history? How could an Afghan nationalist ban girls’ education and music? More importantly, how could Pakistan support Afghan nationalists, whom it considers as existential threat to Pakistan? Moreover, the author observes that Russia, Iran, Pakistan supported the Taliban, and then bring in Afghan nationalism to make his point, which makes little sense.

Methodology

There are very few references (two pages only) used in the article as the research area is a well-explored one. The author can add a few more sources.

Also, there is a date and title problem too. For example, Ahmed Rashid wrote his book, titled Taliban: The Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond, in 2000, not in 2010. The title is Taliban: The Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond, not The Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond.