



# Afghanistan – The New Order of Battle

Briefing Paper  
August 2021

© 2021, **CommandEleven**. All rights reserved.

## Report Authors

“Afghanistan – The New Order of Battle” was written by Lt. Colonel Saleem Akhtar Malik (Retired) He holds an honors degree in War Studies, an MBA and M. Phil in Management Sciences. He is the author of a book on India- Pakistan security paradigm called the ‘Borrowed Power’. He is a regular contributing analyst to **CommandEleven**.

## About CommandEleven

**CommandEleven** is a research organization focused on Pakistan’s national security aspects and enhancing global understanding and collaboration opportunities for the nation.

Founded in 2015, **CommandEleven** provides situational awareness to facilitate a better understanding of the key dynamics that effect Pakistan from a national security perspective, especially in relation to terrorism, insurgencies and extremism.

**CommandEleven** seeks to inform and guide public policy and decision makers in government, business and military through a rigorous program of publications, conferences, digital medias, policy briefings and recommendations.

Visit <http://commandeleven.com> for more information or contact [info@commandeleven.com](mailto:info@commandeleven.com).

Kinetic war, also known as the conventional war, deals with military actions involving active warfare, including lethal force. The phrase is used to contrast conventional military force and "soft" force, including diplomacy, sanctions, and cyber warfare. The Order of battle of an armed force participating in a kinetic military operation or campaign shows the hierarchical organization, command structure, strength, disposition of personnel, and equipment of units and formations of the armed force.

Warfare, during the first quarter of the 21st Century, is transitioning fast from a kinetic to a non-kinetic dimension. Not that the non-kinetic dimension of warfare was missing earlier. However, it is presently becoming the dominant form of fighting between the nations. The hot war will gradually become a corollary to the cold war. However, the hot war will remain an instrument to achieve the coup de grace- the final blow on the battlefield. In that sense, future wars will end even before they are started.

If that be the case, the order of battle between the warring armies will not only include comparative strengths of the contestants and the dispositions of their formations and units, but also the "soft" force, including diplomacy, power to slap military as well as financial sanctions against the adversary, and cyber warfare.

Talking about cyber warfare, the world has witnessed, how, in the not too distant past, Israel used computer malware against Iran's Uranium enrichment facility at Natanz. The Israeli operation which was code-named "Olympic Games," was a cyber-attack disclosed during the Obama administration that disabled nearly 1,000 centrifuges at Natanz. That attack was believed to have set back Iran's enrichment activities by many months.

We had seen, in 1968, how Ayub Khan's regime was destabilized by a surge of inconsequential events which now appear to have been part of a non-kinetic operation to topple him. In October 1968, a small group of students from Rawalpindi's Gordon College was stopped at the customs check post. The students were traveling back to Rawalpindi after shopping for some smuggled hosiery, toiletry, and clothing items. Probably the students had failed to bargain on the cuts the customs people demanded. The customs officials, after seizing the items, let the students go. On their return to Rawalpindi, the students staged a protest against the customs authorities' high-handedness. The peaceful processions soon snowballed into a countrywide agitation. It was the cloud burst uprising that removed Ayub Khan from office.

Such a scenario, blurring the lines between the kinetic and non-kinetic forms of warfare, is unfolding itself in Afghanistan. The world has witnessed the chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan after a twenty-year useless war. We have seen how the US, after spending around three trillion dollars on its war effort in Afghanistan, could not even raise an Afghan army to fight the rag-tag bands of marauders known as the Taliban. We saw how the Afghan National Army melted in the face of the Taliban psychological onslaught and how the Taliban reached Kabul at the end of a whirlwind advance after the withdrawal of the US and Coalition forces.

After the collapse of the Afghan Army and the flight of Ashraf Ghani from Kabul, the Taliban, as of now, are the rulers in Afghanistan. However, after remaining in a state of paralysis for a few days, the retreating Americans, their Coalition partners, and the Afghan

fall guys headed by the ex-NDS chief are recovering from the shock of their sudden collapse and reorganizing themselves. This brings us back to the non-kinetic dimension of warfare.

The US and its European allies control the global financial and banking systems through the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Asian Bank, and their commercial banks. The Third and the Fourth World despots, pseudo-democratic rulers, and the rest of the dirty rich squirrel away their looted wealth in these western banks. The US and the EU can anytime squeeze the balls of these corrupt rulers by blocking their foreign bank accounts. That is why the Saudis, the Emiratis, the Sharifs, and the Zardaris (when in power) cannot dare annoy their western masters.

Coming back to the burning fields of Afghanistan - having failed to stem the tide of the Taliban onslaught, the Afghan carpetbaggers are now threatening the Taliban with the talk about raising a resistance movement, most probably with the US/EU material help and Indian collaboration. Amrullah Saleh, the ex-spy master who is presently hiding somewhere in the border area between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, has vowed to start an insurgency to dethrone the Taliban. The US has frozen USD 7 billion of Afghan reserves, IMF has blocked USD 460 million meant for Covid relief, the US-sponsored banking system is dysfunctional, food prices are soaring and the country might soon end up with food shortages. There are noises in the UN and the EU, demanding the Taliban not to disturb the appletart in Afghanistan, painstakingly maintained by the US and its allies during the last twenty years.

Let us go back twenty years when another cloudburst event had resulted in the US invasion of Afghanistan. The U.S.-led war in Afghanistan began a month after the September 11, 2001, attack on New York's Twin Towers. The US alleged that Al Qaeda, a terrorist organization, had masterminded the attack. Al Qaeda was supported by the Taliban who were then ruling Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden, the Al Qaeda mastermind, was at that time hiding in Afghanistan and the Taliban had refused the US demand to hand him over.

Even before 9/11, events were being channelized in the direction that formed the excuse for the US intervention. The Taliban had imposed a strict Sharia-based government on Afghanistan. Their government was resisted by the non-Pashtun Northern Alliance which was supported by India. A set of sanctions were slapped by the US and its allies which isolated the Taliban. The situation deteriorated further due to the Taliban's tunnel vision which precluded any chance of the formation of an inclusive government.

A similar situation is emerging in Afghanistan in the wake of the US withdrawal. Such a situation provides a perfect opportunity for regional spoilers like India, which thrive on chaos and tumult, to keep the Afghan people on the tenterhook.

If, as it happened in 2001, the spoilers succeed in cobbling together another Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, and if the United States and its allies slap another set of sanctions on Afghanistan, the likelihood of the Taliban collapse will not be ruled out. What is the way forward?

Americans do not despise the Taliban because of their Islamist ideology, or because the Taliban want to impose a theocratic rule in Afghanistan. True democratic rule, based on pluralistic traditions, is not found in the majority of Muslim countries. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the citystates dotting its eastern fringes are absolute monarchies where, at least in theory, Sharia laws are in vogue. Iran, America's nemesis, is not opposed by Uncle Sam because of its fundamentalist and parochial ideology - the US cooperates with Iran wherever it suits its strategic interests, like when it provided Iran with TOW anti-tank missiles through Israel at the height of Iran's war with Saddam Husain's Iraq.

And the US, if Joe Biden, for once, is telling the truth, did not go into Afghanistan for nation building and establishing a democracy there. It invaded Afghanistan to prevent it from being used as a marshaling area for Al Qaeda and other terrorist outfits. Remember what Zbigniew Brezezinski (1998), Reagan's national security advisor, had said almost half a century ago:

***"What is more important — the demise of the Soviet Union or a few stirred up Muslims? There is only a small window when America can grab control of the center of the Eurasian continent. Once we pull the strings in the strategic center (also the home of the world's second-largest oil reserves) we must then playoff Europe against the Orient. This will assure that even a reunited Japan and China will not be powerful enough to evict America from long-term control of the planet's prime landmass."***

The Taliban can survive by addressing the American sensitivities in Afghanistan and by facilitating the fruition of America's strategic interests in the region.

## About the Author

“Afghanistan – The New Order of Battle” was written by Lt. Colonel Saleem Akhtar Malik (Retired). He holds an honors degree in War Studies, an MBA and M. Phil in Management Sciences. He is the author of a book on India- Pakistan security paradigm called the ‘Borrowed Power’. He is a regular contributing analyst to [CommandEleven](#).

## About CommandEleven

[CommandEleven](#) is a research organization focused on Pakistan’s national security aspects and enhancing global understanding and collaboration opportunities for the nation.

Founded in 2015, [CommandEleven](#) provides situational awareness to facilitate a better understanding of the key dynamics that effect Pakistan from a national security perspective, especially in relation to terrorism, insurgencies and extremism.

[CommandEleven](#) seeks to inform and guide public policy and decision makers in government, business and military through a rigorous program of publications, conferences, digital medias, policy briefings and recommendations.

Visit <http://commandeleven.com> for more information or contact [info@commandeleven.com](mailto:info@commandeleven.com).

