



THE TALIBAN AND THE COLLAPSE OF GHANI'S GOVERNMENT AFGHANISTAN: LESSONS FOR NIGERIA

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Abstract

Following the American invasion and the ouster of the Taliban regime from Afghanistan in the wake of September 11 terrorist attack on the US, the American government poured trillions of dollars into the country to build democracy, and the army, to provide security for the country. However, the assistance was unable to bring to an end the friable nature of the state of Afghanistan under the Ghani government. Why was this so? Using the historical method and state fragility framework as a tool of analysis, the paper examined the factors that led to the collapse of the government under Ashraf Ghani, and the lessons it portrays for Nigeria, which is locked in a war with Boko Haram that shares similar fundamentalist ideology with the Taliban. The paper revealed several frailties that occasioned fragility of the Afghan state and the fall of Ghani's government: factionalised elite, gargantuan corruption, a distraught and highly demoralised army, fast decaying public service, and impunity of American forces. Among the statecraft nuggets that Nigeria should learn to avoid similar experience, as suggested in the paper, include the need to urgently and sincerely address fragility issues in the country: corruption and insecurity, with unimpeachable carrot-and-stick approach in dealing with Boko Haram insurgency, among others.

Keywords: Asraf Ghani administration, Boko Haram, insurgency, Taliban, Islamic fundamentalism

1.0 INTRODUCTION

International relations are dynamic compendium of regular intercourse, expected outcomes and surprises. The debacle that occurred in Afghanistan recently was one of such. On August 15, 2021, the world woke up to some hot news: the collapse of Ashraf Ghani government and the hurried departure of hurried American forces, the bolstering prop of the Ghani administration, out of Afghanistan. This was contrary to Biden's earlier plan to withdraw by September 11, 2021 (Murtazashvili, 2021). That was cheery news to fundamentalist groups

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around the globe; but for International Relations analysts and observers, the collapse was hardly a surprise as the fragility of the Afghan state and its inept administration was already a canary-in-the-coal-mine pointer to what the future held for Ghani's government. Perhaps, the only surprise was the chaotic withdrawal of US, the Afghan government superpower backer.

Following the American invasion and the ouster of the Taliban regime in the wake of September 11 terrorist attack on the US, the American government poured trillions of dollars into the country to build democracy, and the army, to provide security for the country (Sabga, 2921). However, the assistance was unable to bring to an end the friable nature of the state of Afghanistan under the Ghani government. Why was this so? This paper examines why the Ghani administration fell using the state fragility framework as a tool of analysis, and as well teases out the lessons that Nigeria can learn from the incident.

To do that, the paper is divided into the following sections: after the introduction above, there is conceptual clarification of Islamic fundamentalism and state fragility. The next section discusses the state fragility framework used in the paper. An application of the twin concepts of Islamic fundamentalism and state fragility theory follows in tow, while a historical discourse on the Taliban and the emergence of Ashraf Ghani's government in Afghanistan comes after. The penultimate section elucidates on the nexus among Islamic fundamentalism, state fragility and the fall of Ghani's administration, and finally nuggets for statecraft that Nigeria can glean from the debacle brings up the rear of the paper.

The Concept of Islamic Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism has been defined as “the belief of an individual or a group of individuals in the absolute authority of a sacred religious text or teachings of a particular religious leader, prophet, and/or God” (Sen Nag, 2017, Discussing Islamic Fundamentalism). It is according to the author, rabidly against criticisms of any sort, neither does it admit of logical explanations and scientific evidence; it should be forced on others, including those who do not share in the ideology. The whole life of its adherents is wrapped around the belief system. Hero (1997, cited in Shboul, 2020, Islamic Fundamentalism) described it as a return to the



early origins the religion (Islam) and its literal application, following the early Muslims (Al Salaf), including their rulings, and is opposed to rational interpretations seeking to adapt its sacred texts to current reality. Applied to the discourse at hand, Islamic fundamentalism refers to the belief that the totality of a society's life - constitutional, economic, social, religious, name it - should be run according to Islamic sacred scriptures such as the Quran and the Sunna of Prophet Muhammed. It also harks back to the practice of the Salaf, the early Muslims that succeeded the Prophet, as the authentic guide for conduct in every manner of Islamic thought and practice.

Fundamentalism was first applied to the Christian theology, in which some American Christians seek a literal interpretation of the Gospel and the same epithet was used to describe Jews who sought a literal application of the Torah (Hoffman, 1997). Islamic fundamentalism has its contemporary roots in the teaching of Hassan Al Banna, the founder of Society of Muslim Brothers, also known as Movement of the Muslim Brothers, which was founded in 1928 in Egypt (al- Banna, 1990, cited in Tibi, 2007). His published work, *Risalat al-Djihad* or Essay on Jihad, adumbrates the essential elements of his ideology. The seminal text was later expanded through the writings and teaching of Sayyid Qutb, the *spiritus rector* of Islamism, who seeks a global *Hakimiyyat Allah*, or the rule by Allah via a jihad that will usher in a world revolution to engender theocracy, as conceived by the Islamists. Such a society, *Pax Islamica*, is obviously at odds with the rationalist Westphalian state system. In this kind of order, there is politicisation of religion and religionalisation of politics (Tibi, 2007). Islamic fundamentalism seeks a reversal of the march of secularism and a reversion to a world ruled by the sacred texts of Islam, seen as the cure-all remedy to the socio-political malaise afflicting the whole of humanity. Such a mindset necessarily sets the fundamentalists up against not just secular governments generally but, particularly, the West, which they see as having an insidious effect on the Muslim society or *Umma*. Those who do not share the fundamentalist view of the world are to be dispensed with in a jihad, including Muslims who see themselves as moderates. A thorough grasp of this ideological mindset is important in understanding why fundamentalist organisations such as Taliban, Al Shabab, and Boko Haram, for example, feel no compunction in killing fellow Muslims whom they see as being corrupted by Western civilisation. Such a



reading and conception of Islam (fundamentalism) has scant respect for human rights and education for women. Nor does it accept a rational debate about religion – it is either you take it or it is forced down your throat.

A major criticism of the fundamentalist conception of Islam is that it is against the central tenet of the religion as a religion of peace. Their conception of a theocracy that overruns every system in the world sets them up against others who equally value their religio-political systems. For example, it is against the Judeo-political order, hence the ceaseless war in the Middle East that is not only impoverishing the Arabs but hobbling development. It is equally a call to arms against the West as the ideology strikes at the very foundational values (secularism, democracy, human rights) of the West. It is no wonder then that the publics in Europe and America support the war against fundamentalism and its terrorist strategy. This ideology, in practice, sets the hand of the ideologues against “every man” and “every man’s hand” against the ideologues, taking a cue from the writer of Genesis (16:12, KJV). It should be pointed out that no Universalist ideology, secular or religious, has succeeded in bringing all of mankind within its fold. It has always bred rebels within and enemies without. Given the history of humankind therefore, Islamic fundamentalism can only be a source and sauce for instability, both on national and global scale.

The invidiousness of this ideology also stems from the fact that interpretation of the Quranic text that they claim should be the basis of their theocracy is open to plurality, owing to its adaptability to different cultural backgrounds, history and epochs, hence we have different sects. An ossification of its application rubs it of its dynamism. For example, we have the Sunni, Shiites, Ahmadiyya and varieties of other groups. Even Prophet Muhammed recognised that such will befall the faith after his departure; for he prophesied that there will be 73 sects, 72 of which will perish and only one that follows the teaching of the Quran will make *Aljannah* (Abdul- Wahid, 2016). Who can determine that but Allah only, as He is the One that knows those who are serving him in spirit and truth? Man cannot know for he sees the outside, but God looks at the heart.



From a peek preview of subsequent discourse above, we have seen that the Taliban routed both the combined forces of Ashraf Ghani government and America on August, 2021. But who are the Taliban and what ideology do they espouse? The Taliban are an ultra-conservative Islamic fundamentalist revivalist group based in Afghanistan, whose leader Mullah Muhammed Omar, together with 50 madrassa students, formed the organisation in Kandahar in 1994 (Stanford University, 2018). They believe in the “return to the fundamentals of an Islamic state that truly shows the essence of the system of Islam, in terms of its socio-politico-economic system” (Arjourmand, 1995, *The Search for Fundamentals*) favouring the literal and pristine interpretation of the Quran, Hadith and Sunnah. They deprecate un-Islamic influences and seek to do away with them in their lives (DeLong-Bas, 2004). In other words, their Deobandi ideology seeks to reconstitute the state along authentic Islamic practice in its [constitutional](#), [economic](#) and judicial framework. In essence, it is a revivalist ideology that seeks a return to the original Islamic practice and a civilisational-cultural ‘awakening’ that is framed as a “revolt against the West” (Bull, 1984; Basam, 2007) or other corrupting influences on the religion. It should be noted that while others outside the group consider them fundamentalist, they see themselves as Islamic revivalists or activists (Exposito, 1992).

The Concept of State Fragility

The concept of state fragility though has discursive antecedents in anthropological studies, especially in the post-decolonisation movement, it is Helman and Ratner (1993) that have been credited with attracting interest in the concept in International Relations through the seminal article published on the subject published in *Foreign Policy* of 1992-93. From the 1990s, it picked up steam in as it was being frequently used in development and mainstream Political Science discourse (Ferreira, 2015; Woodward, 2017). It should be noted that in spite of its frequent usage in the development discourse by institutions, development institutes and others there is hardly any agreement as to the exact meaning of the term (Stewart & Brown, 2009). Stewart, F., & Brown, G. (2009). *Fragile states.*). The definition of the term varies based on the perspectives of individual researchers, organisations or key international actors using the term. Again, even though analytical frameworks, instruments and indexes abound that purport to



measure different dimensions and indicators of the concept, there is no convergence in the methodologies,” leading to different, and sometimes conflicting, views and claims about state fragility” (Ferreira, 2015,p.2).

The German Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation defined as a situation in which government performance is low, its institutions weak or are about to collapse; its core roles are either not performed totally or, where performed are grossly inadequate (FSDR/Devinvest, 2016). Here, what is implicated in the low performance of the government are the weak state structures, which leave gaps in the performance of state *raison d’etre* roles such as security and service provision for the people within its territorial confines. It is this line of thinking that made Canada’s Country Indicators for Foreign Policy project (CIFP) define fragile states as those that ” lack the functional authority to provide basic security within their borders, the institutional capacity to provide basic social needs for their populations, and/or the political legitimacy to effectively represent their citizens at home and abroad”. (Carment& Sammy, 2010, p.13) For the European Union, fragility refers to:

weak or failing structures and to situations where the social contract is broken due to the state’s incapacity or unwillingness to deal with its basic functions, meet its obligations and responsibilities regarding service delivery, management of resources, rule of law, equitable access to power, security and safety of the populace and protection and promotion of citizens’ rights and freedoms (FSDR/Devinvest, 2016, Selected Definitions and Characteristics of ‘Fragile States’).

The above definition includes what is omitted in the German Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation’s definition – incapacity of the state to ensure the rule of law, guarantee equitable access to power and the promotion of the rights and freedoms of citizens. As shall soon be made clear the absence of or inadequacy of these indicators is at the root of tension, crises, and consequent conflagrations that have enveloped countries that have suffered or are suffering paroxysms of terrorism, insurgency, civil war, etc. It should be noted that no nation has been able to provide all these necessities completely, but those that are



in the throes of the upheavals identified above have shortages of these elements beyond the critical threshold. For example, where rule of law has broken down or where perception of inequity in the distribution of resources is widespread, or those invested with state power marginalise a significant section of the nation or its ethnic components, such become a recipe for fragility. To the World Bank fragile states are Low-income Countries under Stress (LICUS), with less than 3.2 points on the Country Policies and Institutional Assessment Performance (Ferreira, 2015). Their signal features include a potpourri of weak governance, policies and institutions - which combine to undermine the capacity to deliver service, keep a tab on corruption and necessary ambience for accountability in those countries (World Bank, 2006). The International Monetary Fund described state fragility using characteristics such as economic and social performance:

Weak governance, limited administrative capacity, chronic humanitarian crises, persistent social tensions, and often, violence or the legacy of armed conflict and civil war. In these countries the poor quality of policies, institutions and governance substantially impairs economic performance, the delivery of basic social services and the efficacy of donor assistance (FSDR/Deinvest. 2016).

The definitions above see a fragile state as one failing to perform substantially the *raison d'être* for state existence: law and order, security and the provision of minimal conditions for the pursuit of economic goals and the provision of basic social services necessary for existence. For example, a nation wracked by violence, or is in the throes of armed conflict or civil war makes the life of its inhabitants precarious, brutish and, in some cases short, as Hobbes avers in his *Leviathan*. This is true of such countries as the Congo Democratic Republic and South Sudan Inability to provide basic social services for the people equally affects the quality of life of such people and may engender crisis situations that death merchants like insurgents or terrorist groups may want to latch on to for the recruitment of the disgruntled into their fold. It is equally a situation that provides the context for gross violation of human rights of the inhabitants of such states. Essentially, fragility occurs in the context of legitimacy gap, authority gap and capacity gap (Stewart & Brown, 2009). For states afflicted by fragility, these gaps are apparent. For the purpose of this discourse, however, the definition that



will be adopted is that proffered by the Swedish Agency for Development and Cooperation because it captures graphically and essentially the Afghanistan debacle under the administration of Ghani. The body conceptualised state fragility as occurring if: a significant proportion of the state does not regard the state as the legitimate framework for the exercise of power, if the state does not or cannot exercise its monopoly of the legitimate use of force within its territory, and if the state is unable or unwilling to provide basic goods and services to a significant part of the population (FSDR/Deinvest. (2016).

There are basically two schools of thought concerning fragile state theory. Those who propound it focusing on performance issues, whose object is to proffer policy recommendations to government or international institutions, and those who belong to the critical school, whose aim is the deconstruction of the ideological, value preferences and assumptions of the purveyors of the concept, particularly the West. The “problem solving” school (Grimm, 2014), focuses on classification of fragile states with a view to identifying and predicting state collapse (Ziaja& Mata, 2010; Stewart &Grown, 2010; Grimm &Shneider, 2011), and providing policy recommendations to avert such. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses have been adopted in examining state fragility by this school (Brinkeroff, 2011). The critical theorists have slammed the use of the concept as a ploy by the powerful states to legitimise, through their governmental institutions, their interventions in weak states’ affairs. Some other critics flay its usage in the social sciences entirely. They averred that it is tantamount to analytical imprecision to lump states such as Malawi, Somalia Columbia and Haiti in the same category and prescribe a one-jacket-size-fits-all treatment for them, which differ substantially from one another, security and capacity-wise. It was because of this terminological inexactitude that made Call (2008, cited in Grimm, Lemay-Hebert; Na, 2014) to call for the complete abandonment of the term in its entirety.

Given this welter of criticisms, how useful is the concept in analysing issues in International Relations? The usefulness of the concept, despite its contested nature, lies in the fact that empirical observation supports that there are states that are grossly wanting in performance of certain critical functions such as provision of security for their citizens, hence can be classified as fragile. For countries



undergoing civil war, this is particularly true. It should be noted; however that state fragility can occur in conflict, post-conflict and peaceful states (OECDiLibrary, 2022).

State Fragility Framework

As noted above, state fragility is of interest to scholars, international actors and organisations. In order to measure state fragility, various approaches have been employed. For example, Carleton University (2022) uses governance; economics; security and crime; human development; demography; and environment. Stewart and Brown (2009) and Call (2010) used three-dimensional approach of authority, legitimacy and capacity, while the OECD framework has a spectrum across six dimensions: economic, environmental, human, political, security and societal with 8 to 10 quantitative indicators in each dimension and 57 in total for all six dimensions (OECD iLibrary, 2022, February, 2022) and the Fund for Peace (2018) fragility index, widely used by local communities, policy makers and practitioners in the field of conflict management. The index, based on Conflict Assessment Framework (CAST) with 12 indicators, subdivided into cohesion, political, economic, social and cross-cutting, issued in this discourse.

Cohesion indicators: These focus on security threats to a country, for example, bombing and terrorism; the trust that people have in the security services, and others, their effectiveness in securing the territory and ancillary issues. It also looks at whether there are factionalised elites or unrepressed group grievances. In factionalised elites, the interest on whether the state institutions are fragmented along ethnic, class, clan or racial lines. In Afghanistan, terrorism has led to thousands of deaths, both of civilian and military men.

Political Indicators: The political indicators include state legitimacy, public services, human rights and rule of law. States that are prone to fragility have some or all of the indicators in critical shortages. A state lacks legitimacy when it does not come to power through established norms, or is not able to win the citizen's confidence owing to perception of underperformance by the government in ensuring security of life and property. With terrorist activities being a regular spectacle in such countries as Afghanistan and Yemen, it is no wonder that they



are reckoned among the fragile states. In Afghanistan, for example, deaths from violent conflicts have been reported since 2008 (OECD Library, 2020). The indicators also include ability to run an inclusive government to put separatist tendencies at bay, as well as interrogating elections and transfer of power. Are elections free and fair and peaceful? How does the government or ruling elite treat opposition members? Does it see them as necessary partners in the service of provision of good governance or as irritants to be dispensed with from the political scene through different forms of persecution - imprisonment or political assassination? Again, does the government promote national identity or is it encouraging fissiparous tendencies through its actions and inactions. For example, when the Janjaweed in Sudan were killing the Southerners, the Sudanese government gave them tacit support. Also, when the Fulani herders were killing people all around Nigeria, the government was busy disarming other ethnic groups, while the herders operate freely with their AK- 47. The consequence has been the promotion of separatist tendencies among the Igbo and Yoruba in the East and Western parts of Nigeria.

Another indicator in the political dynamics of state fragility is public service delivery. This concerns the availability and equitable distribution of public goods or basic services such as water, health, education, electricity and so on. Take for example, the issue of education. Some countries, like Afghanistan under the Taliban rule, discriminate against women in the provision of education; for some others, the poor are disadvantaged in getting this public good. Such a country might be courting fragility as the uneducated citizen of today may become the terrorist tomorrow. The hordes of Almajiris, who are not educated, in Nigeria portend such danger. Availability of infrastructure, such as roads, is also an indicator or otherwise of state fragility. Is the country serviced with good roads? Where the roads are available, are they safe such that the people can conduct their businesses through the length and breadth of the country without fear? A fragile country like Libya or Mali cannot answer this in the affirmative. Ditto for Nigeria.

In terms of human rights and rule of law, fragile states treat these with scant regard. Perception of repression by individuals or groups generally tends to encourage militancy by the aggrieved. It is often the case that such groups take up

arms against the state. The repression of the minority groups in Rwanda led to the catastrophe that the nation witnessed in 1994. Gross human rights violation, curtailment of freedoms, travestied justice system therefore has the tendency to breed mass malcontents, the hotbed for insurrection, militancy and insurgency.

Economic indicators: These refer to a basket of factors – Gross Domestic Product, level of government debt, particularly in relation to Gross Domestic Product, rate of unemployment and poverty levels and others. These factors are important in that they signal distress in the economy. High unemployment rate, particularly among the youths, together with high inflation, could generate belt-tightening measures which, if prolonged, could make the nation to sit on a tinderbox that could spark massive demonstrations, which may put the nation on tenterhooks. Sri Lanka is a recent example. Again, uneven development can spark communal tension and nationalistic fervor among the disadvantaged group where there is a perception of economic inequality by those groups.

Social and Cross-cutting Indicators: These look into the demographics of the country, the issue of refugees and external intervention (Fund for Peace, 2021). The factors that can dispose a country to fragility include high demographic pressures, arising not only from increase in the population but the rates of growth among competing sub national units. A growth spurt that threatens the delicate balance could spark socio-political or economic tensions. For example, in most of Africa where ethnicity determines the voting pattern, a sudden increase in the number of a particular ethnic group could engender resentments from the group that had hitherto enjoyed power and this can promote ethnic tension. Civil wars generate a lot of outflow of refugees across borders, which may tax the resources of recipient nations beyond measure, as well as pose security challenges. This is true of the Afghanistan where civil war has driven millions of refugees to neighbouring Pakistan for example (see **European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), 2022, May, for recent figures**). As for external intervention, this becomes important if the intervention occasions a shift in the balance of power such that a particular faction now, may be the ruling elite, becomes disadvantaged or ousted from power due to such interventions. That generally is a recipe for insurgency as we shall soon see in the case of Afghanistan when the Americans



removed the Taliban from power. The presence of all or some of these indicators potentially point to state fragility. Except pro-active measures are taken, then such states may implode.

Application of the Theories

The fragile state theory provides the context through which Taliban fundamentalist ideology could thrive. With successive government unable to rein in fissiparous tendencies which have occasioned civil war, and Ghani's *effete* government unable to provide the minimum order through which the Afghan could carry out their daily business lacking, the emergence of such ideologues on the political stage seems virtually inevitable. Hence, the fragile state theory can be used to analyse events in Afghanistan under the administration of Ghani. But the war was not just against Ghani's government, it was equally against the United States of America, the staunch backer of the government and indeed its prop. The war to them was Taliban versus America 2.0, a continuation of the earlier war with the United States of America whose forces were at the van in displacing the Taliban government in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in America. As we shall soon see, it equally provides an *apropos explanandum* for the Boko Haram insurgency, the group that rejects Western influence and seeks an Islamic Caliphate in the North East of Nigeria.

The Taliban and the Emergence of Ashraf Ghani Government in Afghanistan: Brief Historical Excursion

In order to understand the collapse of Ghani government, there is need to do a little historical back grounding on the issue. Perhaps the best way to understand the dynamics that were at play in the fall of the Ghani's government is to take off from the April Revolution of 1978. The government of President Daud Khan was overthrown in 1978 in what has been called the April Revolution. That government was under the sphere of influence of the United States of America. In its place came a left-leaning government of Nur Muhammed Taraki. That government embarked on radical reforms in what was essentially a traditional Muslim-dominated society. The land and social reforms proved to be unpopular and hence there emerged a groundswell of opposition to it. The result was the



insurgency carried out by both urban and tribal urban groups, which were rabidly anti-communist and collectively referred to as mujahideen (those who engage in Jihad) ([The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica](#), n.d). The communist government at the centre itself was wracked by internal fighting among the uneasy coalition of People's (Khalq) Party and the Banner (Percham) Party.

The Soviets entered into the fray to support the government of the Banner Party new leader, Babrak Kamal. However, the insurgency persisted and the mujahideen, with the active support of the United States of America, which funneled arms through Pakistan to the rebel forces, was able to wear down the Soviets, which eventually was forced to withdraw in 1989, leaving the country in the throes of power struggle between the forces of the mujahideen and the communist central government led by Najibullah. The latter was overthrown by a combined force of the rebel groups and the rebellious government troops in 1992. But then, the transitional government put together in the post-1992 war could not operate as agreed because Rabbani, the leader of the Jam'iyat-e Eslāmī, which was a major group among the mujahideen held on to office in contravention of the power sharing arrangement entered into with the new government. That led to another slip into civil war that continued unabated till the emergence of the Taliban on the scene in 1996.

The Taliban, as we have seen above, was formed by Omar in 1994. It drew its strength from the Pashtun tribe of the Southern and Eastern Afghanistan. Its emergence shifted the power structure in Afghanistan away from the feuding mujahideens leading it to control most of the Afghan territory. In 1996, it formed the government in Afghanistan and changed the name to Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and introduced a lot of changes to the society according to their own interpretation of the Quran and Hadith. Women were denied education and jobs except in health profession and were expected to wear the burqa and must be accompanied by the male in public places. There were other sundry human rights violations carried out by the Taliban, including suppression of the minorities. With the Islamic fundamentalist government in power, Afghanistan became a haven for many terrorist organisations, including Al Queda, which had fought on side of the Taliban government in the civil war. Following the bombing of the US



Embassy in Nairobi and with a bounty placed on the head of Bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda, who was responsible for the bombing and had fled to Afghanistan, the United States demanded that he be extradited to face the charges but the Taliban government refused. Then came 2001, September 11, Al Qaeda carried out a terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in America. The United States asked the fundamentalist government in Afghanistan to hand over Bin Laden, but the government kept stalling asking for proof of his involvement in the bombing. The United States issued an ultimatum for the Omar government. There was no compliance. America attacked the country, removed the Taliban from power and installed another government in the country. Then it proceeded to build Afghanistan in its own image: a carbon copy of Western democracy. It poured tons and tons of money, \$2,26 trillion according Sabga, (2021) into the country to rebuild it and train a new army that would be able to effectively take over the security on its leaving. Meanwhile, the Taliban regrouped and became a gadfly to the Ghani government that took over from Karzai, following elections in 2014. Through deft psychological and intelligent operational moves, the Taliban drew rings round both the government and its American backers and by August 15, 2021 sent both packing and took over in Afghanistan the second time.

State Fragility, Islamic Fundamentalism and the Fall of Ghani's Government

According to the Fund for Peace Fragile State Index (2022), Afghanistan always ranked between 7 and 9 among 179 states of the world, which underscores the severity of its fragility. There are a lot of factors that led to the fall of the Ghani administration in Afghanistan, virtually all of which border on fragility of the Afghan state under Ghani's watch - state weaknesses in authority, legitimacy and capacity – as enunciated in Carment and Sammy (2010), Ferreira(2015) and Marshall and Cole (2014), and cross-cutting factors(e.g foreign intervention). Of all these factors, the ones that stand out are corruption, failure to build institutions, ineffectiveness of the Ghani government (weakness in capacity), betrayal by the American government (weakness in authority), the ruthlessness of the urbanised Afghan government, Afghan societal dynamics (weakness in legitimacy), foreign intervention – all of which are captured in cohesion, political and cross-cutting indicators in Fund for Peace Fragility Index (2022) – as well as fundamentalist ideology and determination and the operational superiority of the Taliban.



A major factor that was responsible for the defeat of Ghani's government was corruption. According to the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, Afghanistan ranked 172, 173 and 165 in the world in 2018, 2019 and 2020 (Ghosh, 2021, August 15) in that order. The development funds provided by America for the rebuilding of the country went down the drains, being appropriated by the ruling class. Again, of the so-called 300,000 strong army, there are a lot of ghost soldiers, yet their salaries are being collected. We know that a corrupt army is its own enemy. Dale reported that "figures on the size of the Afghan forces were [consistently marred](#) by the problem of so-called "ghost" fighters: no-show soldiers and police officers who were listed on the employee rolls only so corrupt people could collect their salaries" (CNN, 2021, Figures on the size of Afghan forces). To make matters worse, the Afghan soldiers were not paid or fed as appropriate. To survive, some of these soldiers sold their weapons; they openly decried the corruption of the Kabul rulers and the generals who sat on their pay without a whimper from political leaders, who "focused on acquiring power and money for themselves and patronage for their cliques" (Danner, 2021).

Another key factor responsible for the collapse of the Ghani government was failure to build institutions. Both Ghani and his American backers were guilty in this regard. Instead of producing leaders at scale by building institutions, individuals were being cultivated. And as it turns out to be, these individuals lacked leadership qualities that focus on national interest as opposed to personal interest. The army had disreputable heads, who were stealing fuel and starving the forces of food. Even Ghani himself lacked the political skill to weld a traditional, majorly rural country into a modern unit in which national patriotism trumps tribal parochialism. It is no wonder that Afghanistan under Ghani was a disaster awaiting a ripe moment to happen

Another issue was that the government in Kabul did not have effective control of Afghanistan territory. Its presence was majorly felt in the urban centres leaving the rural areas under the control of the Taliban. Besides, the government was not able to effectively provide security for the country. Bombings and other terrorist acts continued unabated. The army was overstretched, underfed, and unpaid as when due. Added to this was a leadership steeped in kleptomania and cronyism.



As observed by Clapham (2010), the presence of the three factors above have the potential of making the state to lose authority and legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. It is no wonder then that the Afghan government quickly folded in the face of the onslaught from the Taliban.

Another factor that whittled down the authority of the government, as well as its backers was betrayal of trust. There was a culture of impunity on the part of the American forces. Civilians were killed without punishment being meted out to those guilty of the offence. According to Airwars (cited in Maass, 2021), some 22,000 (and possibly as many as 48,000) civilians were killed in the course of the war between 2001 and 2021. Such impunity made America to lose its moral authority in the eyes of the Afghans. As observed by Maass, the war reporter of *The Intercept* America's "U.S. bombings in Afghanistan have consistently killed civilians, but the military authorities in (US) have looked the other way instead of bringing the culprits to book. Underscoring the impunity, he wrote that: no American general has been disciplined for overseeing the catastrophic wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, nor for lying to Congress about these disasters.

The opposite has occurred: Stars have usually been added to their shoulders, and when they retire from the military, they tend to march into well-paid positions as board members in the weapons industry or elsewhere. (Maas, 2021, *Elite Accountability*)

Again, whatever moral authority that the American government had was quickly depleted with the peace conference held in Doha in February, 2020 between the Americas and the Taliban, which excluded the Afghan government. Pray, how do you negotiate peace without involving, the *dramatis personae*, those that are regarded as the representative of the Afghans? The peace deal signaled to the Afghan troops that that was the end of the war and the will to fight for was no longer there. Third, the withdrawal of air support for the army left them at the mercy of the Taliban troops. Following the announcement of withdrawal of American troops, air support and contractors servicing Afghan military aircraft were no longer available for the army. Without interdiction and gathering of



intelligence by air, the overstretched and far-flung army of Afghanistan became sitting ducks for the Taliban. It is no wonder then that it quickly unraveled

Also as a factor in the legitimacy crisis in the country is the fact that Ghani's government was made up mainly of urbanites that were cut off from the traditional Islamic society. The Afghan government represented that country's 1% and only 23.4% of Afghans inhabit urban centres with massive income inequality between urban and rural areas of the country, with – an even greater gap between the elites and the ordinary people (Ghosh. 2021. August 16). This society is deeply suspicious, if not outrightly antagonistic, to the Western influences, particularly Western democracy. They saw it as a corrupting influence on this mainly Islamic society and were willing to overthrow the government that represents the “baleful” Western ideology. The Taliban understood this and got the rustic elements who were the majority in the Afghan society on its side. It is interesting to note that it was the elders' council in these rural communities that encouraged Afghan soldiers to hand over their weapons to the Taliban. But for that, Ghani's government could have clung to power.

Still on legitimacy issues, the Afghans are deeply religious; it is a country that is virtually Islamic with the adherents of the religion being 99% of the population (Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, 2021). Added to this is the fact that Afghan society is deeply traditional with strong tribal, family ties that trumps national loyalty. The elders' council plays a larger-than-life role in the society and hence success of any government depends on consultations with these councils. But American “migrated structure” of democracy placed little or no premium on the role of these groups, the result was disconnect between the urbanite Ghani government and the rural majority. The Taliban were well armed with this knowledge and exploited it in negotiating and securing peaceful surrender of the troops in the provinces. This palpable lack of understanding of the Afghan society by America (Lakemfa, 2021) was to cost it dearly and led to the rout of the Ghani government and the Americans themselves.

Given the context of state fragility and the intervention by America, Islamic fundamentalism, as an elixir to redeem Afghanistan from its frangible state,



waxed stronger among its adherents. We should not forget that Islamic fundamentalists believe that theirs is a cause that has divine backing and that as the “forces of good” they will triumph over the evil elements, which to them was represented by the Ghani’s government and the US acting as its prop. The Taliban follows a fundamentalist ideology. Rightly or wrongly, they believe they are fighting the cause of God and that even if they die in the process, *Aljannah* or Paradise is awaiting them. When you have a group with such unwavering commitment and resilience, it is nearly impossible to defeat them. Any defeat is seen as a temporary drawback that can be overcome with necessary re-strategising. That was amply demonstrated in the fight of the Taliban against America by the Taliban 2.0 forces. Their doggedness paid off when they sent both the government of Ghani and the Americans packing in what has been dubbed a catastrophic and shameful withdrawal (Riley-Smith, 2021) and national disgrace (Lee, 2021) for the United States of America. In contradistinction, the Kabul political elite lacked such commitment, and their American backers were unwilling to continue to lose American soldiers in the war. The forces trained by America itself also lacked commitment, their morale plunging as a result of palpable corruption of the Kabul political elite. With the presence of such sharply contrasting dynamics, the fall of the Ghani government was only a matter of time.

Finally, Taliban 2.0 was a completely transformed organised fighting force with new strategies. Their propaganda machine was well oiled to portray the organisation as winning and to persuade the Afghan forces that are willing to fight to give up and go home free or die, they did not just win on the field, they won the *pschops* war as well (Danna, 2021). In sum, Afghanistan was afflicted with several maladies of fragility (see Fund for Peace, 2021): factionalised elites, gargantuan corruption, a distraught and highly demoralized army, arrested economy, fast decaying public service, and American forces who were acting with impunity. It was clear to discerning observers that the Ghani government would sooner than later unravel. That happened on August 15, 2021. Given the above scenario, what lessons does the Afghan debacle portend for Nigeria, and what is the way forward? This forms the focus of the next section.

The Fall of Ghani’s Government: Lessons for Nigeria



What lessons can be gleaned from the defeat of the Ghani's government by the Taliban, particularly for the Nigerian government that has been fighting Boko Haram, a group that seeks to establish Islamic Caliphate in the North-eastern part of Nigeria? The prime lesson from the above discourse is that Nigeria needs to tackle urgently the frailties that bedevil the country, which are indicators of fragility. Take the issue of corruption, for instance. Corruption either in the civil administration or in the military, that is the arm of its policy, is not only dysfunctional to good governance but brews malcontents that become recruits for insurgency. Just like in Afghanistan, the war on insurgency in Nigeria is adrift owing to corruption - corruption through the civilian apparatchiks and the military field officers. Money allocated for arms purchase is embezzled; field officers expropriate the dues of the rank and file; kits are not supplied, and where supplied, are to be purchased at inflated prices by the men of the armed forces! While the soldiers are undersupplied with necessary weapons and sometimes outdated firearms, the insurgents bear sophisticated weaponry. Where is the billion dollars voted for arms purchase? Gobbled by corruption! It is no wonder then that the war against terrorism is flagging despite strings of "successes" peddled in the newspapers.

Again, Nigeria, though not a failed state, exhibits virtually all the indicators of a fragile state: collapsed infrastructure, palpable insecurity on land, air and sea to the extent that bandits attempted to kidnap a sitting governor, Ortom; killed the members of the President's advanced convoy and bragged that their next target was the President himself! Moreover, public education at the primary and secondary levels has collapsed, and that of the university is virtually following suit due to underfunding and incessant strikes by university lecturers running into months. Government is perceived as anti-governed as public policies are swelling the ranks of the poor rather than diminishing it. According to the World Bank, every minute 6 Nigerians are added to the number of the extreme poor (Business Hallmark, 2022), whereas in India 44 are lifted from poverty every minute. The list of systemic decay goes on.

Another lesson is that it is foolhardy to entrust a country's security to a so-called international do-gooder like the United States of America. No matter the persuasion otherwise, Nigeria should use every means possible to develop and



equip its army, as well as train it to effectively engage in counter-terrorism offensive. International politics is too treacherous to place the country's hope in another nation to defend it. The United States, or any other nation for that matter, will not be willing to continually sacrifice its own citizens for the security of Nigeria or any other country for that matter. When the heat turned on the Afghanistan forces, the United States left them in the lurch rather than continue to support the Ghani administration. It was reported that the American Air force Chief for the Afghanistan operation did not tell his counterpart before leaving the Bagram base (BBC News, 2021, July 6) thereby leaving the Afghan forces without air cover. Again, dealing with insurgents imbued with fundamentalist ideology requires both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches. While battling them on the field, irresistible carrots should also be thrown at them in order to break their ranks. A credible amnesty programme could do the trick. The government must see that it keeps to the agreement otherwise repentant insurgents may find the urge to return to the bush irresistible. As well, there is need to address the root causes of the conflict. Government should be able to peel off the apparent manifestations of the issue to unmask the fundamentals of the conflict, the very needs of the insurgents. Grinding poverty exists in Nigeria, reputed to be the poverty capital of the world and the North is the worst hit. With no jobs for the people, present and future prospects are dim. Hence, it will be easy for those who lack jobs and are obviously hungry to be recruited for insurgency. Apart from the issue of hunger, the government should, through a scientific study, find out what motivates the recruits to join Boko Haram insurgency and plan to counteract such with juicy incentives that will make them abandon a course that will lead to certain death.

Another lesson is that the resilience and doggedness of the Taliban recommend themselves for Boko Haram, who could see in them the prospects of eventual victory. If militarily inferior Taliban could defeat US, the greatest military power in the world as at present then, they, Boko Haram, could achieve their purpose with perseverance, like their Taliban brothers-in arm, so they might reason. It behoves the government to take proactive steps to counter such hopes and narratives and undertake reforms that will create inclusive governance for Nigerians irrespective of tribe, creed, religion or culture.



Conclusion

The Afghan government under Ashraf Ghani was the architect of its misfortune. His administration had the chance to rally Afghans to a purpose-driven government that caters for the yearning for freedom, security and good governance by the citizenry, particularly after the disastrous rule of the Taliban in their first coming, but he flunked it, as the Americans would say through corruption, ineptitude, ruthless governance and inability to rein in the impunity of the American forces, who were killing the Afghan civilians in their military campaigns. Of equal significance is the fact that America's support in spite of the humongous amount of money thrown at the country to build democracy failed because they turned the blind eye when corruption straddled the landscape of the country. Again, they thought that money could build democracy in a country with ingrained traditional culture and Islamic religion, which views democracy with suspicion and as an ideology in the pursuit of Western hegemony. That lack of understanding dented America's image and procured for it a shameful military withdrawal from Afghanistan. Therefore, for Nigeria not to suffer the same fate, it should tackle insecurity, corruption and other manifestations of state fragility and pursue inclusive governance to restore hope of Nigerians in government.

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