Nobody would have expected that one of final nails in the US Afghan war’s coffin could come from within the US itself through a revelation of ‘Afghanistan Papers’ by the Washington Post, detailing the mountain of lies that the US administrations spent years telling to sustain their war. But then such a revelation could have come from within the US only where political pundits and the media alike have been trying their best to deny the US president Trump any success story even if it involves a negotiated end of the US’ longest fought war. While many in the US would want the war to end, the ‘Afghanistan Papers’ have dramatically diluted the impact that even a negotiated end of the war could have left on Trump’s re-election bid. In other words, even if the Trump administration succeeds in ending the war through a peace deal, it will reinforce the facts shared in these papers about the whole war being a pack of lies and disinformation, a wrong that even the propagator of ‘America First’ could not correct, although he was not totally unfamiliar with the state of affairs. In fact, Donald Trump’s three years in office have contributed as much to the pack of lies as did sixteen years of George Bush and Barak Obama.

The ‘Afghanistan Papers’ seem to have sent a ‘shock wave’ across the US polity, including the US Congress. But is the shock really that shocking? Ever since its establishment in 2008, the office of Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), has published 45 quarterly reports, fairly extensively detailing the numerous failures of the US war in Afghanistan, ranging from the US’ Counter-Insurgency strategy, the so-called ‘Nation-building’ project and the ‘lessons learned’ in Afghanistan.

In this extensive coverage of failures, the fact that the US presidents continued to escalate the war and pump over a trillion dollars shows the massive bridge of lies that the whole ‘Afghan project’ was and still is that many in the US deep-state want to continue for an endless period; for it has big implications for both geo-politics and the US military.
industrial complex. Indeed, justifications for continuing the war were manufactured by deliberately failing these projects.

As the ‘Afghanistan Papers’ note, “President Barack Obama escalated the war and Congress approved billions of additional dollars in support” and "promised to crack down on corruption and hold crooked Afghans accountable. In reality, US officials backed off, looked away and let the thievery become more entrenched than ever.”

This then is in start opposition to what many top US military officials said publicly in US Congressional hearings. For instance, in 2009, the then US top commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, said in one of the hearings that “the next 18 months will likely be decisive and ultimately enable success,” adding further that “we can and will accomplish this mission.”

Of course, there was always a lot more than just an ‘accomplishment’ of the mission involved in the trillion-dollar war. The mission was never a defeat of the Taliban; it was to turn Afghanistan into a permanent US outpost in the region to maintain advanced military presence close to Russia and China, and of course, Iran.

Of course, the facts that this US adventure caused misery, destroyed a whole country, and condemned thousands to death and millions more to suffer in perpetuity makes the whole narrative about the US war having paved the way for ‘women rights’, strong economy’ and some ‘experience’ in ‘electoral politics‘ as much a part of wider disinformation plan as the whole US war effort has been. How come any of this really happen in Afghanistan when the US officials deliberately continued to turn a blind eye to the many problems that the were aware of and/or produced some of them?

Who is responsible for this widespread story of misery and destruction that Afghanistan is? The responsibility lies squarely on the US civil and military officials for pouring money into a war that they knew from the beginning was and still is unwinnable. But, given the mindset that prevails in Washington, taking responsibility for a failure is a stigma.

On the contrary, if the case had been otherwise and the US officials had truly learnt a lesson, the Vietnam-papers released to New York Times about half a century ago detailing the lies and failures of the US war in Vietnam, the Afghan war might not have taken place. But no real lessons were learnt. On the contrary, the extensive oversight mechanism i.e., SIGAR that was created for this massive project turned out to be highly insufficient to force a rethink in the face of inertia, sunk costs, and short-term political calculations.

What impact this revelation would have on the Afghan war? This will certainly embolden the Taliban in their talks with the US. Knowing that the war has always been a lost cause for the US, the Taliban would harden their position and not allow the US any leeway.

Could then the war in Afghanistan just end the way the US war in Vietnam had ended through an ill-planned withdrawal plan? There is a possibility of such an outcome and this possibility would gain more traction in the wake of a hardened Taliban position, compounded by Trump’s bid to have a truly success story to sell for his re-election.

_Salman Rafi Sheikh, research-analyst of International Relations and Pakistan’s foreign and domestic affairs, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”._