



## **Part Two**

# **Country Perspectives**







## **The New Great Game: The Contest for Afghanistan**

*Walilullah Rahmani*

For more than four decades, every government attempted in Afghanistan has failed. Today, even democracy may be failing. How do we avoid this endless cycle of regime failure in Afghanistan?

Looking back, can we detect a pattern? Can we learn any lessons?

Let us begin with the year 1973, when the monarchy collapsed. The demise of the monarchy was caused when a royal cousin's ambition went unchecked. Instead of gaining control of the family throne, his overreach led to the demise of the family rule of Afghanistan.

The communist form of government failed next, for the same reason the monarchy did: imperial overreach. Communism was doomed the day the communists in Moscow decided that Afghanistan was but a pawn in the game they were then playing for control of the world. Not only did Moscow fail to annex Afghanistan, its great plan cost the Soviets their empire too.

The Soviet failure paved the way for mujahideen rule in Afghanistan. The mujahideen decided that since they had driven the communists out, it was their turn to govern Afghanistan. It was now their turn to fail in Afghanistan. Just like the rulers who had gone before them, the mujahideen took their opportunity in Afghanistan as a signal that it was now time for them to fulfil their ambitions. The once united holy warriors now dissolved into a band of squabbling warlords, fighting each other to grab territory and power for their own personal fiefdoms. Ordinary Afghans were doomed in their crossfire. But this being Afghanistan, the mujahideen rule did not last long either.

The mujahideen created so much chaos in Afghanistan, they

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effectively paved the way for the Taliban. Instead of being repulsed by this band of religious zealots fresh out of Pakistan's madrassas trying to impose a brand of Islam most Afghans did not even recognize, the Afghan people welcomed them as liberators. The Afghans were willing to put up with the Taliban's harsh interpretation of their religion if only these Taliban would get them out from under the rule of the warlords.

Instead of bringing about the just Islamic state they promised, the Taliban turned what was now to be called the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan into a totalitarian state. No aspect of Afghan life was beyond their reach. War widows, even those who were the sole source of support for their minor children, were barred from working outside the home. Girls' schools were closed, toys were forbidden, even the flying of kites. Music, movies – any form of entertainment was strictly forbidden, including the keeping of songbirds. Public expression of joy was not allowed. Even cheering at soccer matches was banned. The only public spectacles the Taliban were enthusiastic about were the public beheadings and amputations and other Islamic punishments they were carrying out – in the soccer stadiums, no less.

The Taliban rule of Afghanistan would be short-lived too. The self-proclaimed leader of the faithful, Mullah Omar, was vulnerable to the false promises of Osama bin Laden because of his delusions of grandeur. As the Taliban was coming to power in Kabul, Osama was desperately seeking a national home. He had been stripped of his citizenship in the Saudi kingdom in the early 1990s for trying to foment Islamic revolution. The Sudanese government had also caved in to international pressure to exile Osama after he and his followers were implicated in a plot to assassinate the Egyptian President. The Sudanese were tired of being a pariah nation and calculated that it was no longer in their national interest to harbour an international fugitive. Afghanistan was one of the few countries which would risk the international disdain that sheltering Osama provoked.

If Mullah Omar granted him refuge, Osama promised him, he (Osama) would use his famous millions to fund much-needed development. Not only did Osama not come through with the money, he proved a much greater liability than Mullah Omar would ever have imagined. In two years, Osama was declaring war on America.

Then he launched attacks against the superpower's embassies in East Africa. No Americans were killed but he did kill hundreds of Africans, wound thousands of others, and bring a rain of missile fire to Afghanistan as a consequence of his actions. Still Mullah Omar resisted international pressure to turn the terrorist over.

Was this because Osama had appealed to Mullah Omar's tribal code of honour or had he convinced the Taliban leader that there was no reason to yield to the United States? We cannot say for sure. But at that very moment, Osama was putting together a plan to bring about the demise of American superpower and maybe he had convinced Mullah Omar that it was ultimately going to be worth it for him because he was going to extend the borders of the Islamic Emirate far beyond Afghanistan.

But instead of causing the collapse of the United States from his cave in Afghanistan, Osama's plan cost the Taliban their Islamic Emirate, and once again he and his band of followers were on the run. Ironically, Osama's attacks on New York and Washington would pave the way for American-style governance in Afghanistan.

Now once again there is reason to wonder whether the American vision of government will fail in Afghanistan. Is Afghanistan doomed to a cycle of perpetual failure? To try and answer this question, let us again avail ourselves of history – or at least a historical analogy – the Great Game in Afghanistan. To analyse the current situation, let us reduce it to what seem to be the three main contests for Afghanistan:

- (i) the contest for political control;
- (ii) the contest for economic control; and
- (iii) the contest for the soul of Afghanistan.

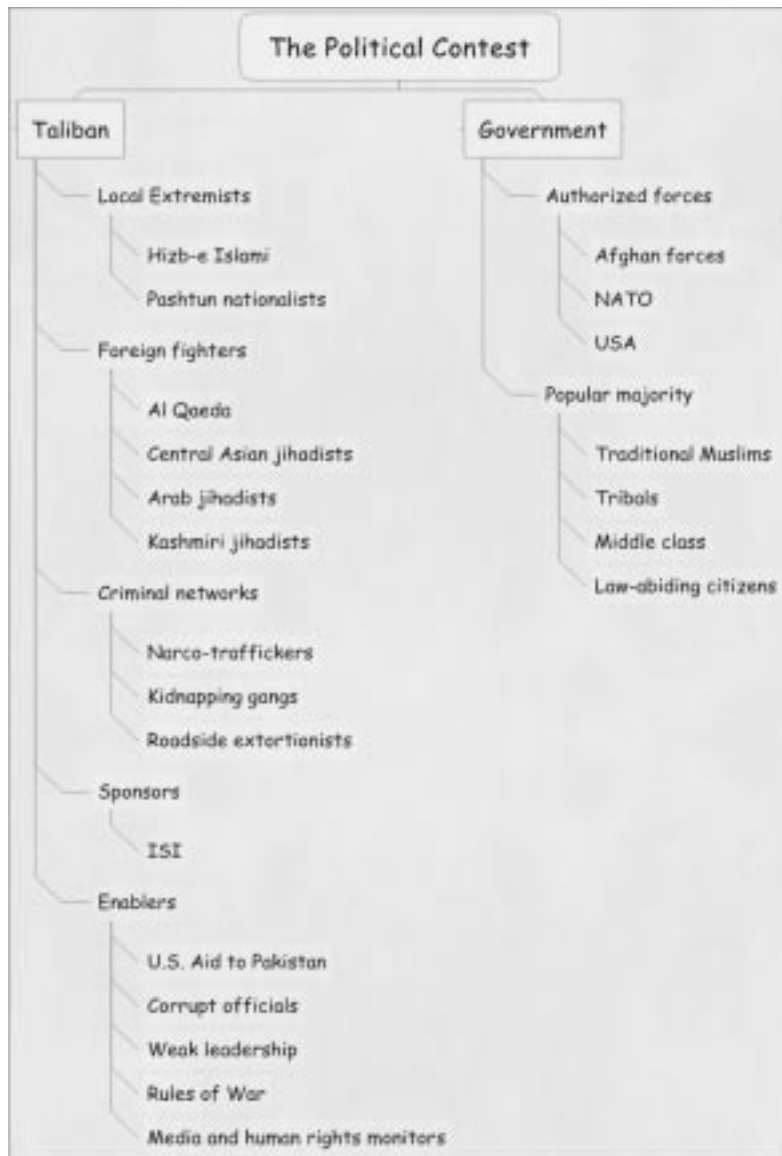
### **The Contest for Political Control**

In the contest for political control, we have the democratically elected government fighting with the Taliban.

Fighting on the side of the democratically elected government are the Afghan security forces, NATO, and the Americans – that is, the

American military forces that are not NATO - for example, the ones running the cross-border operations in Pakistan. On the side of the Taliban there is their base in Afghanistan; the cousins in Pakistan; al-Qaeda; and Gulbuddin Hikmatyar and his followers (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. The Political Contest**



In this contest, while the forces on the side of the government have superior firepower, on today's battlefields superior military strength is no longer a military advantage. Because of the modern rules of war, force superiority may even be a liability.



Consider the situation in Afghanistan. First, the government forces are compelled to obey the rules of war as the legitimate forces of a legitimate nation. By legitimate nation we mean one that wants to maintain its good standing in the international community.

The rules of war require that government forces try and keep non-combatants out of harm's way. This is why the government forces wear a uniform and carry their weapons openly. They must make sure the enemy can distinguish between them, the combatants, and the civilian population, or the non-combatants. Government forces must also keep civilians out of harm's way by locating their military operations outside the confines of civilian areas.

By contrast, the Taliban are not accountable to these rules. As a non-state actor, they are not accountable to the international conventions of war (nor were they when they represented the state in Afghanistan). The Taliban, unlike their opponents, do not feel compelled to wear a uniform; rather they try to blend with the civilian population. Rather than making an effort to keep the non-combatants out of harm's way, they use them as shields – or even targets. The Taliban not only hide among the civilians, they routinely target them in their operations. No place or person is out of bounds in the sights of the Taliban – not tribal peace jirgas, or fresh-air produce markets, not girls' schools or mosques, not even journalists or aid workers.

This strategy allows the Taliban to cast any battlefield loss as a civilian casualty. Targeting journalists and human rights monitors has reduced the probability that anyone will be around to dispute their claims. Moreover, the Taliban have seen how quickly the international media rush to print negative claims, especially ones involving allegations of wrongdoing on the part of NATO or American forces. They have grasped the effect such claims – even false ones – have on force morale or popular support for their efforts.

They have figured out, for example, why the German parliament



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restricts its NATO forces to non-fighting duties. The Germans have resolved to never again find themselves on war tribunals, defending themselves against accusations of war crimes.

A consequence of this is what a NATO officer told a British reporter: Afghanistan might have 51,000 NATO forces, but when you factor out those who are there for the fight and not just the “tree-hugging”, as he put it, that leaves 28,000.<sup>1</sup>

The laws against disproportionate and indiscriminate force also tilt the battle in favour of the Taliban. These are the laws that, the argument is often made, make it illegal to employ disproportionate – that is superior – firepower. Superior force capability should not be used, it can be argued, as it would not be fair.

The irony of today’s battlefield rules was expressed in part by General McKiernan, the commander of the NATO forces: “Never in history has a military coalition taken greater measures to try and avoid civilian casualties than have been taken by [the international forces in Afghanistan].” He should have added: And never in history has one side been forced to shoulder all the blame for the casualties of war. The irony here is that the side that is blamed is the only side that tries to protect the civilian population.

This is how the Taliban can use the rules of war and turn what would seem to be a military disadvantage – inferior force capability – into an advantage. After all, how much force does it take to terrorize vegetable shoppers at an outdoor market? As one Taliban wag is said to have put it, “The Americans might have the watches but we have the time.”

This might be where democracy can be said to be overreaching in Afghanistan. How can the forces on the government side – the Afghan army, NATO, and the US military – win the political contest when it is only they who are compelled to follow the rules of war? The one-sided application of the international conventions could well be the cause of a force fatigue that would be fatal to the democratic project in Afghanistan.

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<sup>1</sup> Christina Lamb, “Mission Impossible”, *The Times* (London), 12 October 2008.



Another possible case of overreach that might be occurring in Afghanistan is the overreach of Pakistan's intelligence service, the ISI. Most Afghans believe that the ISI is aiding the insurgency in Afghanistan. First, because Pakistan owes its very existence to the likes of the Taliban, it would be obliged to help these forces in their quest for Afghanistan. As Abdul Rashid Waziri, a former official in Afghanistan's Tribal Affairs Ministry, points out, it was the religious zealots who convinced the British that Muslims needed to have their own state at the time of India's independence movement.<sup>2</sup>

Afghans like journalist Razooq Mamoon take the argument further. They believe the ISI is indebted to the likes of the Taliban because Pakistan uses Taliban-like jihadis<sup>3</sup> to fight all of its wars, that the Pakistan military almost never confronts the Indian army or its other enemies directly: it relies on the all-volunteer religious zealots that it recruits from its vast madrassa system. This strategy allows the Pakistan military and the ISI to reap any gains, while the militants have to absorb all the losses, especially the ones measured in blood and lives.<sup>4</sup>

Considering the tens of billions of dollars the Pakistan government has received over the years from the Americans and the Saudis during the Soviet War in Afghanistan, and from the Americans in the latest war, these gains are not small. According to a report prepared for the US Congress, just since 2001, Pakistan has received more than \$11 billion from the US alone to promote "Afghan *stability* [emphasis added]".<sup>5</sup>

How long will Pakistan be able to receive this level of aid after Afghanistan stabilizes? The general Afghan calculus is, not long. The economics of the situation is perhaps the most compelling reason the Afghans believe Pakistan has an interest in fomenting insurgency in Afghanistan. As long as Afghanistan remains unstable, Pakistan can count on US aid. Hence its resort to proxy de-stabilizers such as the Taliban.

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<sup>2</sup> "Pakistan's FATA Region: An Interview with Abdul Rashid Waziri", *Kabul Direct*, Vol. 2, No 8, (August 2008).

<sup>3</sup> The paper makes use of two words 'jihadist' and 'jihadi' alternately to mean Muslims who want to establish an Islamic state through

<sup>4</sup> "Origins of Afghanistan-Pakistan Conflicts: Razaq Mamoon Explains", *Kabul Direct*, August 2008.

<sup>5</sup> CRS Report RL33498, Pakistan-U.S. Relations, Congressional Research Service, 25 August 2008.

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Finally, the Afghans believe that as long as Pakistan's Pashtun population – the Taliban's ethnic base in both Afghanistan and Pakistan – fight for control of Kabul, Islamabad can delay the day the Pashtuns turn their sights on freeing Pashtun lands in Pakistan. If the Pashtuns ever achieve their dream of an independent homeland, a large swath of Pakistan would be lost to Islamabad and would be renamed Pashtunistan.<sup>6</sup>

### **What might be the risks in Pakistan's project in Afghanistan?**

The religious militants Islamabad is empowering today to create problems for the democratically elected government in Kabul could well turn their sights on their benefactors in Islamabad at some future point, just like the Pashtun nationalists might. Should the jihadis do this, it would not be the first time the religious militants turned on their patron. This is what happened with the mujahideen the Americans and the Saudis empowered to defeat the Soviets, after all. Out of these armies emerged al-Qaeda.

Also, if the global financial crisis is not resolved anytime soon, investors will remain fearful about entering the markets, and the Americans will be forced to cut back their aid to Afghanistan. The longer this situation continues, the more likely it is that Pakistan will find itself in a desperate economic situation. Observers are already reporting signs of a looming crisis. Chief economist at ABN Amro Bank in Pakistan, Sakib Sherani, reportedly said that high inflation, political instability and the growing threat from Islamist insurgents have all sharply impacted investor confidence in Pakistan's markets.<sup>7</sup> On 6 October both Standard & Poor and Moody's downgraded Pakistani bonds. As John Chambers, managing director with Standard & Poor in New York told a reporter, "Only Seychelles has a lower rating, and it has already defaulted on its debt."<sup>8</sup>

Pakistan has reportedly asked Saudi Arabia for bridge financing, but the oil monarchy is itself concerned about the effect a sustained recession will have on its domestic economy, especially after seeing oil prices continue to plunge even after OPEC nations announced they would reduce production.<sup>9</sup> Pakistan has also reportedly asked

<sup>6</sup> "Pakistan's FATA Region ...", n. 2

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Faiola and Karen DeYoung, "In Scramble for Cash, Pakistan turns to China's Deep Reserves", *Washington Post*, 16 October 2008.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Beijing for help, but given that China recently had to tap the World Bank for aid to cover the unexpected costs of the earthquake in Xian, China has given no indication that it will provide Pakistan the financing it is looking for.

Recent reports suggest that Pakistan is already preparing an application to ask the International Monetary Fund for \$4.5 billion assuming it does not find relief from The Friends of Pakistan who are meeting in Abu Dhabi on 17 November.<sup>10</sup> This means is that Pakistan is on the brink of bankruptcy. Even more frightening is how Pakistan has positioned itself in the current crisis. The IMF has \$250 billion in its bail-out fund. Already, Hungary, Ukraine, and Iceland have asked for aid. If the economic crisis continues, other countries are likely to follow suit. Already some economists are growing concerned about how the IMF bail-out fund will be allocated – that is, which nations deserve to receive funds and which do not. Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel Prize-winning economist, has already expressed concern about Pakistan’s creditworthiness even as an IMF debtor. “If the Fund prescribes such remedies in a socially unstable country like Pakistan”, he reportedly said, “the risks would be enormous.”<sup>11</sup>

What all this adds up to from an Afghan point of view is the concern that Pakistan may well have already overplayed its hand in Afghanistan.

Now let us examine what the American military has concluded might be the greatest challenge to democracy in Afghanistan – the corruption and incompetence of the Karzai administration. According to the *New York Times*, senior diplomats say that the pervasive corruption and the deteriorating security conditions could lead to a complete collapse in popular support for the democratically elected government.<sup>12</sup> American military has concluded that corruption in the nation’s 80,000-strong police force is the primary reason insurgent attacks are increasing in the country in spite of greater than ever numbers of Afghan forces.<sup>13</sup>

To try and remedy the situation, President Karzai recently

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<sup>10</sup> Agence France Presse, 30 October 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Landler, “Healthy Countries to Receive IMF Loans”, *New York Times*, 30 October 2008.

<sup>12</sup> John F. Burns, “Afghan President, Pressured, Reshuffles Cabinet”, *New York Times*, 11 October 2008.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

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reshuffled his cabinet. He replaced his Interior Minister with a former education minister, Muhammad Hanif Atmar, who was, ironically, a former official of Afghanistan's communist-era secret police.<sup>14</sup> Atmar is not the only former communist the US is soliciting help from to try and stabilize the country. The Americans are also reportedly consulting the KGB's top spy in Kabul during the nine-year Soviet occupation, Zamir N. Kabulov.<sup>15</sup>

Is this perhaps a case of American overreach? Does it really make sense for the former enemy of the Soviet Union to solicit advice from former KGB officials? The Russian ambassador himself has tried to answer this question. He reportedly told a *New York Times* reporter, "Why [would] we be jubilant at the prospect of the Americans being defeated by people who will take us on again, as they did in the 1990s in Chechnya?" The Russian ambassador's advice to the Americans, incidentally, was to shift the fighting to the Afghan forces as soon as possible. He says the mistake the Americans have made is one that every invading power since the British in the 1840s has made in Afghanistan. The Americans, he says, like their predecessors, have failed to understand the Afghan allergy to foreign occupation. He warns that this allergy always grows into a fire if the invaders, especially non-Muslims, do not pull out soon. "One of our mistakes was staying, instead of leaving", he told the reporter. "After we changed the regime, we should have handed over and said goodbye. But we didn't. And the Americans haven't, either."<sup>16</sup>

But until something is done about the rampant corruption in the Afghan forces, the Americans are not likely to heed the Russian ambassador's advice. A recently leaked American National Intelligence estimate, as the *London Times* noted, "[cast] serious doubts on [the Afghan army's] ability to stem the rise of the Taliban." Frustration is growing. "We are spending our blood and treasure for what? For an Afghan government that is spending its time lining its pockets" was how a senior NATO officer put the concern to a reporter.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> John F. Burns, "An Old Afghanistan Hand Offers Lessons of the Past", *New York Times*, 19 October 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Pakistan's FATA Region ...", n. 3.

This is why the Americans are coming round to the notion that the real agents of peace in Afghanistan may very well be the traditional power wielders – tribal leaders, the leaders they once were loath to embrace, sceptical that they could possibly be relied on as genuinely anti-Taliban forces. Waziri, the former Deputy Minister of Tribal Affairs in Afghanistan, believes the tribal forces are indeed the correct partners to bring lasting security in their traditional lands. He recalls that it was always the tribes who kept peace in these areas – until 1992. The mujahideen marginalized these traditional leaders. Waziri says that this move created the power vacuum that the ISI then stepped in to fill. He believes the Americans would have been better off had they engaged the tribal leaders from the beginning.<sup>17</sup>

The US seems to have started listening to the counsel of local experts such as Waziri. Senior military leaders, including Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as the UN envoy in Afghanistan, Kai Eide, and the British commander in Afghanistan, Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith, have all recently announced that they are willing to work with any tribal leaders who are willing to support the Afghan government.<sup>18</sup> In October, the US proposed arming pro-government tribes in areas that have been liberated by NATO forces. Then there were reports that US officials greeted warmly the news that Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari was also going to supply arms to tribal anti-Taliban fighters in Pakistan's FATA. In the past several months, anti-Taliban militias, or lashkars as they are called, totalling as many as 14,000, have been established in Bajaur Agency. In the FATA region of Orakzai, some 4000 tribal fighters have been organized; and in the Dir tribal region, another 7000 tribals have been assembled.<sup>19</sup>

Of course there may be a downside to this strategy. The tribes may in fact not be as solidly anti-Taliban as might appear today. Many of these tribals have been known to harbour Taliban and even al-Qaeda forces in exchange for money. Some have also seemed sympathetic to the Taliban's message that Muslims must resist infidel occupiers. This is why many Afghans outside the tribal belt caution that, in the

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<sup>18</sup> Eric Schmitt, Mark Mazzetti, Judy Dempsey, "U.S. admiral joins chorus of Afghan pessimism; Military chief says war will worsen", *International Herald Tribune*, 10 October 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Karen DeYoung, "Pakistan Will Give Arms to Tribal Militias; Plan Bolsters U.S. Faith in Ally's Anti-Extremist Efforts", *Washington Post*, 23 October 2008.

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end, the strategy of relying on tribal militias may not be prudent. Afghans do not have the same tribal affiliation and want to remain free of tribal domination. They do not want to cast their destiny in the hands of people they believe put community and sect above the national interests of Afghanistan. Then again, many Afghans outside the Pashtun tribal belt, like the Americans, have come to the conclusion that if engaging the tribals will secure these areas, then that is what must be done. The Afghans are far, far wearier of continuing war at this point than they are of tribal rule.

The fatigue of constant war has recently driven the Karzai administration to intensify its efforts to find ways to reconcile with its sworn enemy, the Taliban. The government recently sent a delegation to Islamabad to try and work out a strategy with Pakistani representatives as to how the Taliban might be reconciled to peace. The Kabul Center's board advisor, the former Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, led the delegation. The talks concluded on the note that if the Taliban are willing to lay down arms and join the political process they will be welcome – in both countries.<sup>20</sup>

It bears repeating that not all Afghans are convinced of the efficacy of such talks. It is important to keep in mind the risks of this strategy, summarized perhaps by what an Afghan journalist recently wrote in an Afghan newspaper. He cautioned that the risk here is that reconciliation may spell the end of the democratic project in Afghanistan. As he expressed the concern:

Has the world forgotten the crimes Taleban committed over six years of their ruling in Afghanistan? Now the world community cannot see the level of crimes being committed by the Taleban in various parts of the country. They have destroyed the cultural, educational, social and economic infrastructures of the country. They insulted the Afghan nation, tortured them, and massacred men and women.

Shall we believe that today the world community with the most modern and well-equipped forces is not able to get rid of one or two thousands of tribal militants?<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Carlotta Gall, "Afghanistan Tests Waters for Overture to Taliban", *New York Times*, 30 October 2008.

<sup>21</sup> BBC Monitoring South Asia, "Afghan daily says talks with Taleban insult to nation, Text of commentary: 'Do not negotiate with Taleban' by private Afghan newspaper Arman-e Melli", 25 October 2008.

Again, many Afghans, like many Westerners, have had to acknowledge that given today's restraints on legitimate fighting forces, a military victory against the Taliban does not seem likely at this point. The rules of war tilt the battlefield to the advantage of the Taliban, and raise the price of victory beyond what NATO and democratic countries seem willing to pay. And so talks of reconciliation seem to be the last desperate hope of the democratically elected government in Afghanistan.

The question is whether the Taliban will reciprocate these gestures of peace. Can they accept basic law, the will of the Afghan people, and cease their campaign to destabilize the nation?

Former Taliban officials, who have chosen the path of peace were recently invited to break the fast in Mecca by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia along with representatives from Afghanistan and Kabul. The Saudi King hosted this peace talk in response to repeated requests by President Karzai for the Saudis to help put Afghanistan back together. The Saudis have played a role in Afghanistan's descent into three decades of war – it is a Saudi form of Islam in which the Taliban can call upon to sentence fellow Muslims they deem as apostate to death sentences. Saudi (and American) funding made the mujahideen victory against the Soviets possible. And it was the Saudis who were one of only three countries in the world to acknowledge the Taliban as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan. For these reasons, the Afghans have long wondered why the Saudis were abdicating their responsibility for Afghanistan's problems and not engaging themselves in the peace process. But again there is danger here. After all, it was Osama's differences with the Saudi monarchy that ultimately gave rise to al-Qaeda.

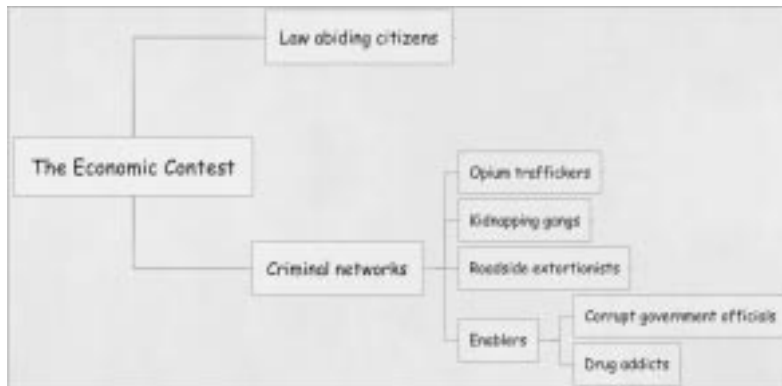
And so the winner in the contest for Afghanistan is yet to be determined.

### **The Contest for Economic Control**

The contest for Afghanistan's economy pits the Afghans who want to live their lives inside the law, abiding by the rules of their faith, and run legitimate businesses, grow legal crops, against the narcotics traffickers, kidnapping gangs, roadside extortionists and, of course, the

corrupt officials who give the criminals the space they need to operate (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. The Economic Contest in Afghanistan**



There are many reasons why the criminals should not be allowed to win this contest. Iran, for example, can testify about how damaging it has been to live next door to a narco-state.<sup>22</sup> Iran now has the highest per capita opium consumption of any country in the world, thanks to living next door to Afghanistan. Pakistan is also coping with skyrocketing levels of addiction thanks to its proximity to Afghanistan. Countries in Central Asia, and as far away as Europe, are negatively impacted by Afghanistan's opium production.<sup>23</sup> The US military has now concluded that the opium traffickers are funding the insurgents, providing them with as much as \$100 million per year. The US has apparently assembled enough evidence to finally convince formerly reluctant NATO partners such as Germany, Italy, Poland, and Spain that the risks of not expanding the NATO mission to include the eradication of opium outweigh any harm that ending opium production may cause to ordinary Afghans engaged in the trade.<sup>24</sup>

There is good news to report on this front. UN drug experts recently announced that the "opium flood waters in Afghanistan have

<sup>22</sup> Judy Dempsey and John F. Burns, "NATO Agrees to Take Aim at Afghan Drug Trade", *New York Times*, 10 October 2008.

<sup>23</sup> *2007 Opium Survey*, United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime.

<sup>24</sup> Dempsey and Burns, "NATO Agrees to Take Aim at Afghan Drug Trade", n. 21.

<sup>25</sup> Brownwen Roberts, "Afghanistan's Opium Production, Cultivation Down: UN", *Agence France Presse*, 26 August 2008.



[finally] started to recede.” More than half of Afghanistan’s provinces are now opium-free. Among the opium-free provinces is Nangahar, which was the second-largest opium producer in 2007.<sup>25</sup>

The UN attributed the waning of opium production in Afghanistan to severe drought as well as the efforts of Afghan governors, tribal elders and religious leaders in convincing the citizens they needed to abandon the trade.<sup>26</sup> UN, NATO, and American officials are further hoping that Gulab Mangal, the new governor of Helmand Province, where two-thirds of Afghanistan’s production still occurs, can make a dent in its production as well in the near future.

As Britain’s ambassador to Afghanistan, Sherard Cowper-Coles told the BBC, “We have an extremely competent governor in Helmand who has a plan in the next few months for getting farmers to switch from poppy cultivation in the coming season.”<sup>27</sup> If the British forces are as optimistic as their ambassador is, this would bode very well: they form the core of the NATO force in the province.

Recently, American officials have become increasingly critical of the Karzai regime’s inability or unwillingness to stem corruption among high-ranking officials. As a former State Department official, who recently completed a two-year stint in counter-narcotics, wrote, his experience in Afghanistan forced him to conclude that

Karzai was playing [the Americans] like a fiddle: the U.S. would spend billions of dollars on infrastructure improvement; the U.S. and its allies would fight the Taliban; Karzai’s friends could get rich off the drug trade; he could blame the West for his problems; and in 2009 he would be elected to a new term.<sup>28</sup>

While ultimately these claims might be shown to be true, we must be careful to avoid letting mere allegations destroy political careers. Should Afghanistan allow its politicians and other officials to be done in by unproven claims, this would surely kill Afghanistan’s chance for democracy.

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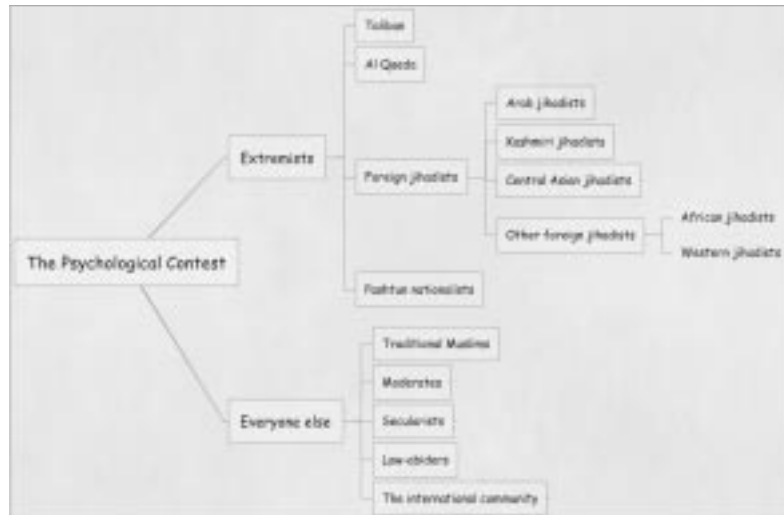
<sup>26</sup> Colum Lynch, “Afghan Opium Production Falls, Despite Problem Provinces”, *Washington Post*, 27 August 2008.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Schweich, “Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?” *New York Times*, 27 July 2008.

## The Psychological Contest

**Figure 3. The Psychological Contest in Afghanistan**



In the contest for the soul of Afghanistan, there is the vast majority of Afghans versus the extremists – the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and their followers – the Muslims who have somehow got the impression that the fast route to Paradise passes through Afghanistan. Contrary to popular belief outside of Afghanistan, the majority of Afghans – even in the Pashtun belt – no longer support the extremists. They have seen what happens to powerful individuals – tribal leaders, for example – who dare to oppose the Taliban. In October, for example, a suicide bomber detonated a vehicle bomb during a meeting of the elders in Pakistan’s FATA, killing forty of the tribal representatives and wounding another hundred because the tribal leaders were meeting to strategize on how they could discuss to get rid of a Taliban base in their area.<sup>29</sup> Then another four tribal elders were beheaded in the Bajaur Agency. Their crime was that they were pro-government.<sup>30</sup> Dozens of Afghans suspected of aiding the government were recently pulled off a bus in Kandahar. The Taliban then announced that they

<sup>29</sup> Qazi Jawadullah and Pir Zubair Shah, “Bomber Strikes Anti-Taliban Meeting, Killing More Than 40”, *New York Times*, 10 October 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

beheaded thirty of these passengers; they were charged with being soldiers masquerading as civilians – a claim that the government vigorously denied.<sup>31</sup>

According to Waziri, until the madrassas in the tribal areas agree to stop acting as safe houses, training centres, and recruiting stations for the Taliban, militancy will continue unabated. It is the madrassas, he says, that educate the youth, and make them believe that if they are to be good Muslims they must fight jihad in Afghanistan.<sup>32</sup> The good news, according to Waziri and others who know the Pashtun areas well, is that the tribals can be enlisted on this front too. Waziri claims the tribals are more than eager to bring their youth back to their tradition, away from the intolerant version of Islam promoted by the Taliban and other jihadis, who generally follow the Deobandi or Salafi interpretations of Islam, while traditionally the tribals have always followed the Hanafi school. Some Afghan leaders believe that it could be productive to reach out to the leaders of these schools and ask them to rein in the radical madrassas – for example the network of madrassas run by the Haqqani family in Waziristan, that are associated with the Dar ul-Uloom or Deobandi school. There are indications that the Deobandi leaders are grasping the damage their jihad-oriented madrassas are doing to Islam in general and Deobandism in particular. Last May, for example, the Islamic seminary Dar ul-Uloom Deoband in India, the worldwide headquarters of the Deoband movement, issued a fatwa condemning terrorism in general. In the ruling, the clerics stated that terrorism was contrary to Islam because the true mission of Islam was to spread peace in the world.<sup>33</sup>

The May fatwa followed a February fatwa, the Dar ul-Uloom's first-ever ruling, condemning terrorism. As the *Times of India* pointed out, the February fatwa was widely welcomed as a "significant step" in "rallying public opinion against terrorism".<sup>34</sup> Then in mid-October, radical clerics in Pakistan came out with a fatwa repudiating the use of suicide and senseless jihadi attacks in Pakistan. While the Afghans were disappointed that the fatwa was silent on fighting jihad against

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<sup>31</sup> Carlotta Gall and Taimoor Shah, "Taliban Kill Dozens in Bus Ambush, Officials Say", *New York Times*, 19 October 2008.

<sup>32</sup> "Pakistan's FATA Region ...", n. 2.

<sup>33</sup> "Deoband first: A fatwa against terror", *Times of India*, 1 June 2008.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

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Walilullah Rahmani

fellow Muslims in Afghanistan, it was seen as a small step forward that among the clerics who signed the fatwa were some of Pakistan's most radical clerics.<sup>35</sup>

## **Conclusion**

While many pessimists outside Afghanistan seem ready to write off the American project, most Afghans are not prepared to concede failure at this point in time. They are unwilling to abandon all hope for their homeland. For many Afghans, democracy is the first form of government to recognize them as equal citizens of Afghanistan. In all earlier forms of government, minority communities were always treated as lower-class citizens. The Afghans are not the only ones who will lose if democracy fails in Afghanistan. If the Taliban win, there is no doubt that Afghanistan will once again become a terrorist haven, home to some of the world's most extreme militants. No state in the region or in the world should find comfort in that prospect.

Should the criminal elements win the contest for Afghanistan's economy, the addiction rates now seen in Iran should be taken as an omen of what other countries can expect – not just the neighbours but countries as far away as Europe. A narco-state in Afghanistan would likely mean that the country will become a haven for other criminal elements, in addition to the terrorists. We should expect to find gun runners in a failed state, which means that would-be revolutionaries in the neighbourhood will now have a convenient market in which to purchase arms, and train. A narco-state will host smugglers, who will siphon off profits from legitimate businesses; kidnapping and extortion gangs who will terrorize law-abiding citizens – and again, not just in Afghanistan but outside Afghanistan too. Finally, if the extremists win the contest for Afghanistan's soul, their highway to Paradise will surely not terminate in Afghanistan. No state will be able to count on remaining outside the crosshairs of these so-called armies of Allah who want to impose their vision on the entire planet.

The history of Afghanistan shows that invaders and would-be

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<sup>35</sup> The schools listed were the Jama'at Ahle Sunnat (Barelvi), Ahle Tashayyo (Shia), Ahle-Hadith, Jama'at, Jam'at-e Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e Islam (Deobandi), and the banned Sipah-e Sahaba (Deobandi). BBC Monitoring South Asia, 16 October 2008.

conquerors should be wary of thinking of Afghanistan as though it were a pawn, a buffer state, or a convenient place to reward favours and avenge enemies. Afghanistan's history also makes clear that what happens in Afghanistan does not stay in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's problems can and will affect the neighbours, the region and, as we have seen, even a country as remote and powerful as the United States. By contrast, if democracy is permitted to take hold in Afghanistan, if the international community comes together and helps this happen, no state should ever have to fear living beside or near a democratic and secure Afghanistan. Democracy can even be a win-win situation for Afghanistan's current enemies. They can be welcome into the fold of a democratic nation. The only thing they will have to lose to do this is their arms, but they will have much to gain.

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## **The Afghan Conflict and the Regional Countries**

*Haroun Mir*

During the era of the Great Game, when the Russians and the British competed over their expansionist and colonial strategies in South and Central Asia, Afghanistan remained a mutually agreed buffer zone between them. Until the early twentieth century Afghanistan had remained a tradition-bound country. The wave of modernization brought by the European colonial powers during the nineteenth century did not penetrate Afghanistan. Modern education and public administration were introduced in Afghanistan during the 1920s. The country remained poor and dependent on financial assistance from both the British and Russian empires.

In 1919 Afghanistan recovered its full sovereignty from the British, and King Amanullah tried to introduce a number of liberal reforms to modernize the Afghan society based on his inspiration from his trips in Europe and Turkey. However, his efforts did not last long because his regime was overthrown by a conservative military officer, who opposed liberalization of the Afghan society.

In the 1930s and 1940s Afghanistan remained neutral between the belligerent European powers and tried to attract their financial assistance. In the late 1930s Germany had a huge diplomatic mission in Afghanistan, with close to 600 diplomats throughout the country. During World War II the US wanted to use Afghanistan as an alternative supply route to support the Russian forces engaged in the war against Nazi Germany.

The Afghan rulers were unable to take advantage of the exceptional opportunities they had in the 1930s and early 1940s. World War II changed the balance of power in South and Central Asia. The new Soviet Empire replaced the Russian Empire, and the British Empire was weakened to the point that it had to abandon India. The partition of India and creation of Pakistan in 1947 created a challenge for Afghanistan, which lost its buffer zone position to Pakistan, which became a major ally of the West in the region.

Afghanistan's relationship with its new neighbour soured immediately because the Afghan authorities opposed the creation of Pakistan and its entry into the United Nations. Meanwhile, immediately after World War II, new tension arose between the East and West which led to four decades of cold war. Because of the growing enmity with Pakistan, Afghanistan built a modern army and sought financial and military assistance from one of the two superpowers. Since the US authorities made their choice to support Pakistan as an ally in the region, the Afghan authorities sought financial and military assistance from the erstwhile Soviet Union. In 1955, Afghanistan was among the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement and wanted to maintain its neutrality between the two superpowers, but because of growing tensions with Pakistan, the country tilted towards the Soviet Union.

During the 1960s and 1970s the political leadership set Afghanistan on the right path towards development. A number of countries, including the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, Germany, France, and Japan, provided the country with financial, technical and educational support. King Mohammad Zahir Shah also introduced a series of liberal political measures such as a new constitution and parliament, and named Prime Ministers who did not belong to the royal family, thus opening the way for a constitutional monarchy.

In 1973 the king's cousin, Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan, toppled the regime through a military coup. Daoud's regime was strongly influenced by the Communist Party. Reacting to this influence, students with Islamic ideology tried to foment a popular uprising against the regime in Parwan, Badakhshan, and Kunar provinces. Kabul University also became a place of confrontation between the communists and Islamists. However, generally the people refused to work against the regime. A number of Islamist activists were captured. Some of them escaped to Pakistan, where they found a haven.

President Daoud tried to reduce the communist influence in his government, but it was too late. After making a rapprochement with the Shah of Iran and Prime Minister Bhutto of Pakistan, he imprisoned most of the communist leaders in Kabul. However, the Afghan Army was heavily infiltrated by the communists, and staged a military coup against the Daoud regime in April 1978.



### **Internationalization of the Afghan Conflict**

After a few regime changes in Afghanistan which brought to power different communist factions, in December 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan to ensure that Afghanistan was ruled by a pro-Soviet government. The Soviet Union then got bogged down in the conflict, which accelerated the demise of communism worldwide and the collapse of the Soviet Union itself as a political entity. Pakistan meanwhile was able to accomplish its long-term dream of transforming Afghanistan as its strategic western base to protect itself from the Indian military threat.

In the late 1980s, the Soviet leaders, realizing that they could not win the war in Afghanistan, started to look for an exit strategy from Afghanistan. The Glasnost policy adopted by Mikhail Gorbachev helped him open dialogue with his Western counterparts such as the then US President Ronald Reagan. The two leaders agreed on the concept of “negative symmetry” in Afghanistan, while working on a negotiated settlement once the Soviet withdrew in 1989. However, before a solution was reached the circumstances had changed. The Soviet Union disappeared and Afghanistan was left at the mercy of the regional countries. Because the US lacked a strategic interest in Afghanistan, Washington delegated its policy in Afghanistan to both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which were two of its close allies.

### **Regionalization of the Afghan Conflict**

The disintegration of the Soviet Union created an unprecedented situation in the entire world and particularly in South Asia. For the first time the major powers disengaged from the region and the regional countries were left to compete over their interests. For instance, Pakistan and India entered into a nuclear arms race. Afghanistan became a chessboard between the Saudis and Pakistan on one side, and Iran, Russia and India on the other side.

#### ***Saudi Arabia***

Saudi policy in Afghanistan shifted from defeating the communist ideology to containing the Iranian influence in South Asia and in the newly liberated Central Asian Republics. They believed that radical Sunni Islam would be a natural obstacle against the propagation of

revolutionary Shi'a doctrine in the region. Therefore, they invested heavily in radical madrassas in Pakistan, where a considerable number of Afghan and Pakistani youth sought religious education. In addition, the Saudis funded a number of mujahideen parties, which struggled to promote the Wahhabi brand of Islam in Afghanistan.

Saudi Arabia did not have a physical presence on the ground in Afghanistan. Prince Turki al-Faisal, then the chief of the Saudi intelligence services, had tried to send a number of Saudis to participate in the Afghan war. The majority of the Saudi citizens stayed in Pakistan and became involved in charity activities among the Afghan mujahideen and refugees in Pakistani cities near Afghanistan, such as Peshawar and Quetta. Only a few Saudi citizens such as Osama bin Laden, who gained fame in the Islamic world, occasionally crossed the Afghan border to take part in the fight against the Soviet and Afghan communist troops.

Because of their limited knowledge about Afghanistan and poor and physical presence in that country these Saudis relied mainly on the Pakistani military for the delivery of aid to Afghan mujahideen parties. The financial assistance went to radical parties such as Hizb-i-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Itihad-i-Islami of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. The Saudis considered Jamiat Islami, which was a Tajik-dominated party, as pro-Iranian because of the common language between Tajiks and Iranians. Saudi Arabia was among the three countries (besides Pakistan and the UAE) which recognized the Taliban regime in 1996.

### ***Pakistan***

On 12 November 1898, the Afghan ruler, Emir Abdul Rahman Khan, and the Foreign Secretary of British India, Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, signed the demarcation line between British India and Afghanistan. Ever since Pakistan came into being, this Durand Line has been a contentious issue between the two countries. They have not officially ratified their common border.

Pakistan's military has always feared that a strong Afghanistan would dispute the border. In addition, an economically prosperous Afghanistan would become more attractive to the Pashtuns and the Balochis who live in Pakistan but have greater cultural affinity with the Afghans.

In addition, Pakistani authorities consider that their country is sandwiched between two hostile countries – India and Afghanistan. After losing the largest chunk of their territory to Bengalis, Pakistani leaders fear that similar dismembering could happen with the Balochi people in the east, and with the Pashtun in the NWFP.

The destruction of Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, followed by a civil war, created a unique opportunity for Pakistan to realize its long-term strategic goal, which consisted of imposing a subservient government in Kabul by making Afghanistan dependent on it. The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had specific plans to destroy Afghanistan's military, economic and social infrastructure.

In the spring of 1992, when the communist regime led by Najibullah fell, Ahmad Shah Massoud's forces entered Kabul, and mujahideen leaders based in Pakistan agreed to share power by creating a coalition government in Kabul. However, Pakistani authorities, who were upset with the takeover of Kabul by the forces led by Massoud, instructed their trusted man and surrogate Hekmatyar, who had just been appointed prime minister of the newly established coalition government in Kabul, to burn down the city with deadly rocket attacks.

From 1992 to 1994, the Afghan capital became a virtual hell. Hekmatyar's forces were stuck in the southern and eastern parts of Kabul and were unable to make significant progress. The Pakistani authorities then decided to shift their support from Hekmatyar to a then-unknown radical movement — the Taliban.

The Taliban movement was created under the direct watch of Benazir Bhutto and Nasrullah Babar, then respectively the prime minister and interior minister of Pakistan. In September 1995, Colonel Imam (a senior ISI official), with the complicity of western officials who had an interest in the Turkmen pipeline project, personally led the Taliban forces to capture Herat, the largest city in western Afghanistan.

As a result of the destruction that accompanied the Taliban takeover, foreign embassies closed. The educated and prosperous people left the country. The ISI instructed its agents across Afghanistan to destroy Afghanistan's military hardware, industrial

machinery and all other equipment, which had been left by the Soviets. Factories, military assets such as tanks and airplanes, and other sophisticated equipment which were destroyed were then sold in Pakistan as scrap. Eventually, the Taliban regime closed schools, universities and public offices in Afghanistan.

The Pakistanis were able to attract the attention of a well-developed network of charity from the Gulf Countries. The estimates of charity from these countries vary between \$150 million and \$200 million, which effectively financed the Taliban regime and other radical Islamic groups involved in fighting in Afghanistan and in Kashmir.

### ***Iran***

Iran has historically enjoyed great political and economic influence over Afghanistan. Iran has no territorial disputes with Afghanistan, but the dispute over the use of water from the Hirmand River remains unresolved. Iran's Afghanistan policy over the past three decades has been consistent with its geo-strategic interest, which consisted of expanding its influence through a greater role for the Shi'a in the country. Similar to Pakistan's ISI, Iranian authorities, such as the Sipah-i-Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards Corps), have also recruited, financed, and supported Afghan militia forces.

In the 1980s, the Iranians had the common objective with the mujahideen of defeating communism in Afghanistan, and provided them financial and military assistance. During the 1990s, the Iranian interest shifted towards supporting Shi'a groups in Afghanistan. For instance, when mujahideen parties formed a coalition government in Afghanistan, the Hizb-i-Wahdat party leader Abdul Ali Mazari, who was killed by the Taliban in 1996, demanded a greater share of power in the Afghan government. When Burhanuddin Rabbani and Massoud did not accept Mazari's demand, he simply joined his efforts with Hekmatyar and Abdul Rashid Dostum to overthrow the government in Kabul.

During 1992–1994 fighting between the Wahdat and Sayyaf forces as well as between the Wahdat and Jamiat forces resulted in the destruction of most parts of Kabul. In addition to financial and military support, Iranian military advisors from Sipah-i-Pasdaran provided training to Wahdat forces. Similar to what happened in Kabul, the

forces of Dostum and Mohamed Mohaqeq allied together to remove the Jamiat forces from the northern provinces and important cities such as Mazar-i-Sharif.

The Iranians and their surrogates, such as Mazari, were obstinate about extracting a greater role for the Wahdat party by putting pressure on Massoud and Rabbani. For instance, when the Taliban reached the doors of Kabul, Mazari preferred to surrender to the Taliban rather than join the coalition governing body in Kabul. His miscalculation cost him his life because the Taliban killed him. However, his close ally Hekmatyar did not surrender to the Taliban and reached out to Kabul and was safely escorted from Kabul to Kunduz, and from there he went to Iran.

The Iranians recognized their mistake after the Taliban took control of big cities such as Herat and Kabul. In Mazar-i-Sharif the Taliban captured and killed two Iranian diplomats, which led to military tension between the Taliban and Iran on the Afghan–Iranian border. Iranian support for the anti-Taliban coalition arrived late, at a time when it was difficult to slow the momentum of the Taliban. In addition, the Iranian assistance was insignificant compared to what the Taliban were receiving from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Iran at that time was facing an enormous economic and social crisis, having recently emerged from a protracted war with Iraq.

### ***Russia and Central Asian Republics***

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and the Central Asian Republics had one concern in Afghanistan, i.e., the rising wave of radical Islamic groups and their cross-border infiltration into the Central Asian Republics. They, therefore, preferred to establish a buffer zone in northern Afghanistan by supporting Rashid Dostum.

After the fall of the communist regime in 1992, Dostum's forces remained the only military force which did not belong to a particular party. Sibgatullah Mujaddidi, who was appointed head of the transitional government in Afghanistan, did not have a significant military force like other mujahideen parties. Once in Kabul, he tried to buy Dostum's allegiance in exchange of his political support, of which Dostum was in dire need. It had been agreed under the Islamabad Accord signed by the mujahideen party leaders that

Mujaddidi would cede his post as head of the state to Rabbani, but Mujaddidi backtracked on this commitment. To strengthen his own position he incited Dostum to distance himself from Ahmad Shah Massoud. Dostum also claimed that a number of foreign countries had also influenced his decision to side with Hekmatyar against Massoud. Dostum did not have any particular political agenda and looked for greater autonomy from Kabul in the five northern provinces he had under his control. Dostum had received financial assistance from Uzbekistan and Turkey. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey expanded its pan-Turkic agenda in Central Asia, including in its ambit the Turkic tribes of Afghanistan.

The Russians and the Central Asian political leaders, busy with their own internal economic and political crises, were unable to distinguish between the different mujahideen parties. They were unable to grasp the importance of strengthening Dostum's alliance with Massoud. The continuous military conflict during 1993–1996 between Massoud and Dostum had weakened both forces. Losses between the two forces reached 7000 soldiers. It was only when the Taliban reached the northern provinces bordering the Central Asian Republics that they and Russia started to assist the anti-Taliban coalition.

### **India**

Before its partition in 1947, India served as the only exit door for Afghanistan to the rest of the world. In the early 1900s when the Afghan rulers wanted to introduce modern administration and education in the country, they hired Indian administrators and educators to teach and train Afghans in the newly established schools in Kabul.

The relationship between India and Afghanistan has always been friendly, and historically, the Indian government has always assisted the Afghan central government regardless of the nature of the regime in Kabul. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, India had kept close ties with the communist regime in Kabul. India also hosted a considerable number of Afghan refugees on its soil. Despite pressure from the communist regime in Kabul, the Indian authorities never expelled or created obstacles to Afghan refugees living in India.

The Indian authorities also assisted the mujahideen regime in Kabul.

Unlike the other regional countries, India never provided military assistance to these political groups during their internal fighting in the 1990s.

However, making a complete break with history, the Taliban regime adopted a hostile policy towards India. It collaborated with terrorists who hijacked an Indian airplane in December 1999, which landed in Kandahar. The hostage crisis was resolved through the mediation of the Taliban. It was clear from the beginning that Pakistani authorities were behind the hijack incident.

In the face of the hostility of the Taliban regime towards India, the Indian authorities increased their assistance to the anti-Taliban coalition in Afghanistan. However, despite direct interference of the Pakistan government in Afghanistan's internal affairs, the Indians avoided military assistance to the anti-Taliban political groups. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, India underwent difficult economic reforms, and it only asserted itself as a regional economic power in the late 1990s. India's financial contribution to the anti-Taliban coalition was insignificant relative to the amount of money donated to the Taliban movement by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

### **Re-internationalization of the Afghan Conflict**

By 9 September 2001, when Ahmad Shah Massoud was assassinated, no one gave the anti-Taliban coalition more than a few days of survival to resist the ultimate joint assault of the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and the Pakistani militia in the stronghold of Massoud in Badakhshan and Panjshir. The ultimate winners of the Afghan conflict over more than a decade of competition among the regional countries were Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which succeeded in their joint strategy in Afghanistan. But the terrorist attacks on US soil on 11 September 2001 once again brought Afghanistan into the international spotlight.

The Afghan conflict became internationalized seconds after the hijacked airplane crashed into the World Trade Center buildings in New York on 11 September 2001 because the al-Qaeda link to the attacks was obvious. This time the US could not limit itself to a rocket

strike on al-Qaeda bases or against the Taliban government in Afghanistan as it did after the attack in 2000 on USS *Cole* in Yemen.

Pakistani and Saudi authorities smartly avoided any arguments with the US over the survival of the Taliban regime. However, they had tried to convince the Taliban leaders to hand over Osama bin Laden to the US authorities and avoid US invasion of Afghanistan. The US decision to uproot the Taliban regime in Afghanistan became irrevocable, and therefore the Taliban leadership preferred to escape to Pakistan rather than comply with the US demands.

The coalition forces landed in Afghanistan; Kabul was liberated; and the Bonn agreements helped the creation of a coalition government known as the Provisional Government. All neighbouring and regional countries which opposed the Taliban regime were happy to see NATO troops fighting for their interests. They firmly committed themselves to assist the new Afghan governing authority to consolidate itself. The threat emanating from al-Qaeda and the Taliban forced even Iran to cooperate with the Afghan government despite the fact that the US expanded its military bases throughout the country and in the Middle East by invading Iraq.

However, despite the international consensus on Afghanistan, Pakistan's military leaders have pursued their failed policy in Afghanistan. While they captured and handed over a number of al-Qaeda activists to the US authorities, they turned a blind eye to the activities of the Taliban leaders in Pakistan. According to Afghan intelligence sources, the Taliban leaders and military commanders have enjoyed freedom of movement and activity in Pakistan.

The United States' initial objective of defeating the Taliban and eliminating the leadership of al-Qaeda was compromised by the miscalculations of its political and military leaders who underestimated the importance of foreign support to the Taliban and overestimated the scope of military cooperation from Pakistan in the war on terror. The Taliban, after being defeated by American forces, escaped to Pakistan, where they found a haven. Additionally, they received financial assistance from a complex network of charities originating in the wealthy Gulf countries. President George W. Bush turned a



blind eye to Pakistan's complicity with the Taliban because of the United States' engagement in the war in Iraq. There is today broad agreement among most experts on Afghanistan that the war in Iraq has seriously undermined the "war against terror" in Afghanistan both in terms of military and financial resources because Iraq became a quagmire for the US government and therefore getting out of there without losing face became a top priority.

An assessment of the current situation in Afghanistan shows a downward trend at least since the beginning of 2006. The security situation has been deteriorating, the development projects are stagnating, and the political situation has been worsening. Indeed, in the absence of immediate preventive measures, the country might once again slide back into a failed-state status as during the 1990s.

A growing insurgency and increased terrorist attacks against NATO forces have shaken the will of a number of NATO's European members. Some of them are just looking for an exit strategy from Afghanistan because their public opinion might not agree with an extension of NATO mission in Afghanistan beyond 2013.

Afghanistan in 2008 is not better off than in 1988. The government's authority has been reduced to the immediate peripheries of big cities and the insurgents are closing in on Kabul. The Afghans have lost their trust and confidence in the authorities in direct proportion to the boosting of morale of the Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters. The Western public opinion has become fatigued by the lack of progress and might accept an eventual reintegration of the Taliban as a political entity in Afghanistan.

### **Towards Re-regionalization of the Afghan Conflict**

There is growing concern among NATO's European members about an open-ended commitment in Afghanistan. They are looking for any pretext to declare victory and leave Afghanistan. For instance, the British authorities are keen on bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table. The British interests in the region differ from those of the US. The initial US objective of defeating the Taliban and eliminating the leadership of al-Qaeda was compromised by miscalculations of its

political and military leaders who underestimated the importance of foreign support to the Taliban and overestimated military cooperation from Pakistan in the war on terror.

Recently, the US military and intelligence services were able to convince the White House that terrorism could not be defeated in Afghanistan unless they wiped out the Taliban's havens in Pakistan. Although Britain opposes any strikes against terrorist camps inside Pakistan, the US military rightly expanded its military operations across the Pak–Afghan border.

The prospect of Pakistan becoming a failed state looms large for the international community. Britain and Saudi Arabia are very concerned about the future of Pakistan for different reasons. Britain is home to more than two million Pakistanis. The London terrorist attacks of 7 July 2005 were planned and executed by British citizens of Pakistani origin, trained in the terrorist camps in Pakistan. Therefore, Britain chiefly prizes stability in Pakistan, fearing that a failed-state Pakistan would be too heavy a burden at home.

Britain's knowledge of the Afghanistan and Pashtun tribal belt in Pakistan dates back to the eighteenth century. But the old Pashtun tribal structure vanished during the past three decades of conflict in Afghanistan. The current British effort at reaching out to the Taliban has already failed. Since the British forces moved to Helmand and began negotiating a secret truce with the Taliban, the situation in the province has deteriorated. The British zeal to negotiate with the insurgents would buy valuable time for the Taliban and al-Qaeda to regroup and expand their operations in the relatively stable provinces of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

A number of European analysts have already adopted a defeatist tone vis-à-vis the Taliban. They are evoking the past military defeats of the British and Russians as an argument to seek an exit strategy and leave Afghanistan in the hands of the regional countries as they did in the early 1990s.

The idea of seeking a regional solution for Afghanistan is gaining momentum in the Western capitals. However, the balance of power

in the region has changed in the last several years. India and Russia have become regional economic and military powers. Pakistan has been weakened considerably and relies on its atomic arsenal to defend itself against India. Iran has become more assertive in the region and will not tolerate an adversary regime in Kabul. China would play a stabilizing role because of its need for energy and natural resources which abound in the Central Asian countries.

Consensus over Afghanistan would be very difficult to arrive at among the regional countries. Indeed, all regional countries could play a positive role in stabilizing Afghanistan, but without NATO's involvement it will be difficult to convince these countries to abandon their self-interest for the greater regional interest.

As long as the Indian and Pakistani territorial contention exists, and Saudi Arabia and Iran compete in the region, it will be difficult to reach an agreement among the belligerent countries over Afghanistan. In fact, if the West abandons Afghanistan back in the hands of the regional countries, a repeat of the 1990s would take place, where each regional country would support its proxy force in Afghanistan.

## **Conclusion**

The continuation of conflict in Afghanistan after the collapse of the communist regime in 1992 resulted in the destruction of Afghanistan's vital political, military, and economic institutions. The country became a failed state, where pockets of political and military powers emerged in the major provinces of the country, which undermined the unity and cohesion of the country and its people.

During the subsequent two decades of conflict, much of Afghanistan's economic infrastructure was destroyed. Most of the irrigation canals were ruined and valuable animal stocks were depleted dangerously. Destruction of schools and the educational system caused boys and girls to grow up without any formal or traditional education. After the fall of the communist regime in 1992, Afghanistan fell even deeper into political disarray. Its ties with the world, particularly the international multilateral organizations, were severely damaged. The majority of Afghans had to rely on assistance from

non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and humanitarian aid agencies for their survival.

In addition, a significant number of Afghan youth have undergone extensive radicalization through madrassas in Pakistan. Today, there are more mullahs in the country than there are mosques to absorb them. In the absence of jobs and income most of the madrassa graduates are prone to join terrorist groups for their livelihood.

Immediately after the events of 11 September 2001 Afghanistan became a matter of international interest and the UN Security Council agreed for regime change in Afghanistan, which brought hope to the Afghans, who have suffered tremendously during almost three decades of conflict.

During the last seven years NATO's stabilizing mission has been compromised by the resurgence of the Taliban and other terrorist groups. In addition, the pace of reconstruction and development has been very slow relative to the promises made to the Afghan people in terms of economic development. But contrary to the increasing crescendo of defeatism in the West, the situation in Afghanistan is still manageable. A majority of the Afghans are in favour of the presence of the coalition forces in the country. The Taliban's resurgence is related more to the deteriorating situation in Pakistan rather than lack of military success in Afghanistan. The Afghan security institutions, such as the army and the police, will need at least an additional decade of direct military support before they can defend Afghanistan from internal and external threats.

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## **The War on Terror: Challenge and Opportunity for Regional Cooperation**

*Babar Sattar*

As the war games continue to strike civilians in Pakistan who have no control over the policies and choices of their state, the US administration or the Taliban–al-Qaeda duo, the Pakistani nation is losing its soul, its spirit, its honour, security and means of subsistence. The question that continues to confuse and divide Pakistanis is: whose war is this, after all? Is the Pakistan army a US proxy, fighting an alien war against its own people? Or is this an internal war that needs to be waged with unity and conviction by the Pakistani nation to secure the lives of ordinary citizens, dry up fountains of religious extremism and hate, and defeat home-grown terrorists who view the killing of innocent civilians as a legitimate tool to try and transform the security policy of the Pakistani state?

The less emphasized reality is that there is not one war on terror being fought in this region, wherein Pakistan and the US are jittery allies, but two separate wars with distinct goals and objectives. One is the US war on terror that was born out of the events of 11 September 2001. This is aimed at securing the lives of Americans and to protect them against future attacks from al-Qaeda and its supporters. In its post-9/11 frenzy, the US homeland security doctrine underwent a significant change when the Bush administration decided to “take the war to the terrorists”. This strategy led the US to bulldoze the questionable concept of pre-emptive first strike as part of conventional warfare into the doctrine of self-defence. The US contrived a “coalition of the willing” to launch attacks on Afghanistan under the garb of this expansive concept of self-defence and that is how this war came to Afghanistan.

When the attacks were first launched on 7 October 2001, they were devoid of UN authorization or cover. The same day the US representative to the UN delivered a letter to the president of the UN Security Council evoking the right to self-defence as justification

for the strikes to forestall imminent attacks from al-Qaeda, that was training and exporting agents of terror from Afghanistan. By passing a resolution in support of the new Afghan government installed after US-led forces routed the Taliban, the UN has merely acquiesced to the role of NATO and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in assisting the Afghan government with domestic security. Thus to argue that the US and NATO strikes in Afghanistan are authorized by the United Nations is to misunderstand the US and NATO mandate in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>

The legality of US or NATO air strikes within Afghanistan that cause civilian casualties has to be determined under Afghan law, as these forces are operating within Afghanistan on the request of a national government recognized by the UN and the world. But NATO and the US have no collective security mandate in the region. And while strikes within Afghanistan that indiscriminately claim civilian lives might only be morally abhorrent, any strikes within Pakistan are also illegal and clear violation of the UN Charter. No sovereign nation-state can afford to tolerate foreign military strikes within its territory that reduce to fiction the concept of its territorial integrity.

Further, incidents such as the air strike that claimed thirteen Pakistani soldiers manning a border post,<sup>2</sup> the US Special Forces ground operation that recently killed twenty civilians in Angoor Adda<sup>3</sup> and repeated drone attacks targeting the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)<sup>4</sup> not only brew anger and hate against the US within Pakistan but also dilute the nation's conviction to fight the second war that is Pakistan's own. This second war is the one Pakistan ought to fight against terrorists and hate-mongers who use an obscurantist religious ideology as their philosophy, the federal tribal area as their sanctuary, and suicide bomb attacks against civilians as their strategy to promote their political agendas.

This is Pakistan's own war that will need to be fought and won to

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<sup>1</sup> Seated alongside Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai in his maiden press conference after being sworn in as President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari insinuated that NATO forces were carrying out security operations in the region pursuant to UN mandate. See <<http://www.daily.pk/politics/politicalnews/7216-president-asif-ali-zardari-and-hamid-karzai-democracy-on-the-back-of-an-american-tank.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> *Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)*, 11 June 2008.

<sup>3</sup> *Dawn*, 4 September 2008.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Times*, 11 September 2008.

afford security to the average citizen, establish the rule of law in all areas comprising Pakistan and allow Pakistan to develop its identity as a progressive Muslim country. 9/11 might have lit the match and reckless US military actions in Pakistani territory continue to add fuel, but let us admit that for decades before the twin towers came down we had been gathering timber for the fires that now rage across Pakistan.

The US war on terror being waged in Afghanistan and Pakistan's indigenous battle against extremism are two different wars. The US war is focused on disabling terror networks from launching attacks against US interests and citizens in the future. Pakistan on the contrary is currently under siege and a declared war zone. The security operation in the tribal areas has claimed the lives of more soldiers than Pakistan's all other wars put together and the country has lost many more citizens to violence since 9/11 than the US did on that fateful day. Pakistan should not be consumed by efforts to "do more" and prove its loyalty to the US cause of impeding future threats to its citizens.

The pain caused by the loss of an innocent life in Pakistan is no less than that in America. The Pakistan government needs to wake up to the fact that its job is to secure the lives of Pakistani citizens and the interests of our country by fighting our own war against in-house insurgents and terrorists with courage and determination rather than continue General Pervez Musharraf's flawed policy of playing second fiddle in the US war. There is a natural synergy between these two wars, but whether they complement or impede each other will depend on how carefully strategies are crafted to ensure that the US war effort in Afghanistan does not undermine Pakistan's effort to curb militancy within the country.

This paper seeks to highlight components of Pakistani state policy that have contributed to the creation of the security monster that now engulfs the country. In tracing the roots of violence, the paper argues that while the causes of violence in Pakistan have local roots, it feeds on the war raging in Afghanistan. If the Afghan war and the insurgency in Pakistan are allowed to continue unabated, the mayhem could transcend the existing theatres of war and breed tension and violence in India and Iran as well. Not only does the entire region

have a shared stake in finding a sustainable solution to the conflict, but such a solution will continue to evade us unless a comprehensive approach is adopted to understand and address the international, regional and local influences that contribute to the crisis.

Restoring peace to Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region more generally requires integration of international, regional, national and local approaches to fighting the terrorism and violence being perpetrated by non-state militant actors. While the US has single-handedly defined the international response to terror, and Afghanistan and Pakistan are employing national and local strategies that fit within the contours of the US war on terror, the lack of a shared regional approach is undermining war efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

This paper suggests that the US war on terror being waged in Afghanistan and the related insurgency within Pakistan pose a regional challenge that could be transformed into an opportunity for regional cooperation by agreeing on a coherent regional plan to tackle the violence, which in any event is imperative to give peace a chance in the region.

### **The Response to Violence**

In the post-9/11 world, the Taliban are almost always bunched together with al-Qaeda. While the Taliban can be criticized for introducing an obscurantist and brutal regime in Afghanistan, they were not the architects of 9/11. They did provide sanctuary to al-Qaeda and refused to hand over its leadership to the US,<sup>5</sup> but in doing so they were only imitating their predictable cultural response to threats of violence. This is not meant to be justification for the Taliban, their ideology and activities, but only to point out that they must be distinguished from al-Qaeda. Even if misguided, Taliban are sons of the soil and their ambition is not geo-strategic but limited to preserving control over their territory and culture.

Likewise, notwithstanding their rhetoric, the tribal insurgents in Pakistan are not waging a jihad to conquer the US but only against foreign invasion. Unfortunately, the Pakistan army is now seen as

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<sup>5</sup> CBS News, 21 September 2001.



the agent of the foreign invaders, making it the prime target in its own country. The US-led NATO forces fighting in Afghanistan and their sponsors in the West wish to believe that an overwhelming majority of Afghans welcome their presence and see them as agents of the much-desired change. It is true that the Afghans crave peace and change, but one that is home-grown and not imposed from abroad. With all its pro-9/11 bravado, the US and the West is turning a blind eye to the history of this region and its acute xenophobia.

Another lesson from history is that the West has no appetite for embracing military casualties in foreign lands in pursuit of lofty moral objectives such as promoting democracy and human rights. As casualties rise and the realization of military objectives in Afghanistan becomes a forlorn hope, NATO will take no time to pull out of the country, leaving the Afghans to their own devices. Pakistan is also indulging in similar folly by fighting the locals on its side of the border, with the exception that while the West has a worse-case exit strategy to leave the region, Pakistan has none and neither do other regional states.

On paper Pakistan has a three-pronged policy that has military, political and socio-economic components: generate negotiation leverage by use of military muscle; negotiate from a position of strength with Taliban groups and militants willing to renounce violence; and undertake socio-economic development in the tribal areas to raise the standard of living of the tribes and give them a stake in maintaining peace. Unfortunately, there is a sharp disconnect between the theory and practice of this war.

Pakistan's tribal areas remain amongst the most underdeveloped regions of the country,<sup>6</sup> and having lived with the death of near ones and destruction of personal properties, residents who remain have nothing more to lose except their own lives. While fancy ideas abound, the socio-economic development on the ground amounts to naught. For example, the architects of Pakistan's indigenous "three-pronged policy"<sup>7</sup> are yet to exhibit their power of persuasion that would

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<sup>6</sup> <<http://www.fata.gov.pk/subpages/socioeconomic.php>>.

<sup>7</sup> "Government pursuing three-pronged strategy to nip extremism, terrorism: Sherry", *Associated Press of Pakistan*, 15 September 2008.

convince local industry to move its business units to export promotion zones in the tribal areas where even Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan does not get safe passage.<sup>8</sup>

The military and political components of Pakistan's security policy are not poised either. The country's stated defence and security policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan is to have friendly relations with its western neighbour and fight along with coalition forces to weed out al-Qaeda and the Taliban from the region and deny them sanctuaries in Pakistan's tribal areas. But Pakistan's traditional security doctrine views Afghanistan as a vital hinterland capable of providing Pakistan strategic depth in a conflict with India.<sup>9</sup> And there seems to have been no reconsideration of the policy itself and the strategies devised to realize the policy amid transformed regional realities. Afghanistan is no longer a discarded Cold War battlefield of the 1990s or a regional backyard used by India and Pakistan to undermine each other's interests.

The events of 11 September 2001 and the refusal of the Taliban government to hand over al-Qaeda operatives provided the US with an opportunity and a reason to occupy Afghanistan. The country has nothing appealing to offer the world at present except its geo-strategic location. Having set up a watch post in this vital Asian energy corridor with the added ability to monitor Iran and China up close, the US might find a reason to stick around even if Osama bin Laden called it quits tomorrow and handed himself over. In this backdrop Pakistan can ill afford to continue with a policy whereby on the one hand it is openly allied with the US in fighting a war that is extremely unpopular and enrages the entire populace, and on the other go soft on the Taliban to protect its conventionally perceived strategic interests.

There is a need for Pakistan to recalibrate its defence and security policy and ground it in a political roadmap for the future of the tribal areas. On the political front Pakistan needs to set a timeline for making FATA an intrinsic part of the country and endow its residents with all the rights and responsibilities provided under the Constitution.<sup>10</sup> Unless

<sup>8</sup> <<http://www.pak-times.com>>.

<sup>9</sup> Brigadier Feroz Hassan Khan, "Rough Neighbors: Afghanistan and Pakistan", *Strategic Insights*, II(1) (January 2003) at <<http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/jan03/southAsia.asp>>.

<sup>10</sup> Safdar Sial and Aqeel Yousufzai, "Tribal Areas: What will FCR be Replaced with?", *Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies*, 16 April 2008; Ziad Haider, "A Door Opens for Reform in Pakistan – Part II", *Yale Global*, 25 August 2008.

Pakistan moves towards clarifying the legal status of its north-western frontier tribal belt and implements constitutional rule with all its benefits, sustainable peace will remain a forlorn hope and mischief-rewarding peace deals will continue to blow up in the face of the state.

On the military front Pakistan needs to reconsider the strategic depth doctrine in this age of digital warfare, and completely abandon the tactic of appeasing and keeping in store militarily trained, ideologically motivated zealots to help pursue the strategic goals of the state. Even if the lessons from involvement in the Afghan War against the Soviet Union are lost on Pakistan, the death of over 1100 soldiers since 2002, the killing of thousands of civilians in suicide bombings and terror attacks, as well as the loss of security of life and liberty of citizens across Pakistan is not an acceptable cost for pursuing misconceived strategic goals of the state. There can be nothing more dangerous for the future of Pakistan than its decision-makers remaining stuck in outdated and failed ideas.

### **The Roots of Violence**

The tribes inhabiting Afghanistan and FATA are fiercely protective of their autonomy.<sup>11</sup> Their violent response to foreign invasion – be it Punjabi or American – cannot be subdued by greater violence. And no amount of spin can change the underlying reality that the Western forces continue to be viewed as occupation forces in Afghanistan. The claim that foreign forces are actually welcomed by the tortured and suffering local populations is predicated on the argument that peace is all that people of a war-ravaged country want. Most people do wish for peace and economic prosperity, but not at the cost of dignity. It is dignity and national pride that continues to evade a nation under the siege of a foreign army, irrespective of how noble the intentions of such “peacekeeping” force are.

Opening up of new recruitment areas is a contribution of the war on terror, but the manner in which this Muslim identity manifests itself through violence and suicide bombs within Pakistan is our own contrivance. Further, the oppressive ritualistic expression of the extremist mind-set that locks women up, forces men to grow a beard

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<sup>11</sup> See O.K. Caroe, *The Pathans, 550 B.C.–A.D. 1957* (1958); J.W. Spain, *People of the Khyber* (1963), *The Pathan Borderland* (1963), and *The Way of the Pathans* (2d ed. 1973).

and abhors art, music, creativity and entertainment finds accommodation in our harsh tribal culture where it does not disturb the political economy of the tribal society where, in any event, women are not allowed to function as productive members of society. The prevailing cultural norms in Pakistan's tribal areas are not diametrically opposed to the social order being preached by the extremists.

The threat currently confronting Pakistan is not that Talibanization will convert over the moderate majority of this country to its retrogressive ideology and programme, but that it will strengthen its stranglehold over the tribal areas in NWFP and Balochistan and continue to export violence and anarchy to the rest of Pakistan. But continuing to view the problem of extremism through the prism of the war on terror threatens to keep our understanding of the causes of violence partial and our quest for solutions evasive. The debate on Pakistan's security policy that lists the country's available options as refusing to function as America's foot soldier in the war on terror versus willingly fighting America's war in our tribal areas is simplistic and misleading.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, when an angry US turned on Pakistan, the Musharraf regime's squealing message to the West was twofold: (i) the world must understand the roots of Muslim rage and address the injustices and root causes that stoke this anger that then plays into the hands of violent religious ideology and culminates in terrorism, and (ii) the history of constructing jihadi outfits in Afghanistan and Pakistan's tribal belt, and training and supporting the 'mujahideen' (the Taliban, militants or terrorists of today) is long-winded and all supporters of the Soviet–Afghan War of the 1980s have skeletons in their closets.<sup>12</sup>

General Musharraf sermonized that any necessary military operation had to be backed by long-term multi-pronged approach to address the perceived injustices being meted out to the Muslims, strengthen moderates within Muslim societies and financially empower the areas most susceptible to the scourge of extremism. Yet Pakistan has failed to heed its own advice in its attempt to stifle the insurgency in its north-western tribal belt.

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<sup>12</sup> *Dawn*, 24 June 2004.

One, Pakistan has failed to confront its bigoted approach toward religion (a) by not creating ample public space to freely debate and develop a national consensus over the appropriate role of religion in the state, and (b) by granting general amnesty to anyone purporting to act in the name of Islam, including those preaching ideologies of hate, collecting charity for jihad, carrying out vigilante actions to enforce morality or even banning haircuts and music. Pakistan's convoluted politics of religion has allowed religious extremists to conceive ideologies of hate and propagate them publicly without any fetters.

Two, Pakistan's security establishment granted legitimacy to the jihadi project and elected to use non-state actors motivated by religious zeal to realize the goals of the national security policy. It is widely believed that jihadi outfits have been nurtured, patronized and harnessed by the state as part of a considered strategy to promote Pakistan's geo-strategic interests. The project was misconceived. But there still seems to be scant recognition of the fact that the state lacks the ability to decommission jihadis or alter their terms of engagement in the event that the country's security policy needs to be altered in view of changing geo-strategic realities, as happened after 9/11.

And three, Pakistan's tribal areas have fallen beyond the writ of the state since the country's birth and over the last sixty-one years precious little has been done to integrate them with the rest of Pakistan. A whole generation of Pakistanis has grown up calling the tribal areas "illaqa ghair" (territory that does not belong).

It was common knowledge that all stolen vehicles and abducted individuals would wind up in the tribal area and could be recovered only through the intervention of tribal leaders upon payment of ransom. Fugitives from justice were given refuge in FATA under the local tradition of hospitality, bara markets were the repositories of smuggled goods and tribal area was the fountainhead of all drug trade. And the news of militants in FATA challenging the writ of the state is met with alarm.

Pakistan's paramount failure in FATA is not that it has been unable to keep the traditional malik system<sup>13</sup> intact during the post-9/11 turmoil, but that for six decades it did not bother to bring its wild west within the scope of the Constitution and afford its residents the complete rights, benefits and responsibilities that citizens deserve. The residents of tribal areas were never naturalized as citizens bound by national laws and policies. The collapse of archaic authority structures in the tribal areas and all-out rebellion against state policy was a disaster waiting to happen and the US invasion of Afghanistan only precipitated it.

### **Proliferation of Religion-inspired Militaristic Ideology**

The roots of violent religious thought can be traced back to the writings of Syed Qutb and Hassan al-Banna during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>14</sup> The project and desirability of purging Muslim nation-states and societies of vice before exporting jihad to foreign lands sought inspiration from the literature produced by these theocrats. This brought about the advent of private moral brigades zealous of producing born-again Muslims through jihad-turned inward. And once the use of suicide terrorism against civilians within the context of the Arab–Israel conflict came to be excused as a necessity by leaders of Islamic religious thought, it only took 9/11 and the disputed legitimacy of foreign policy of some Muslim states to make suicide terrorism an acceptable means to pursue the so-called pious ends of religious extremists within Muslim states. This completed all

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<sup>13</sup> In 1901, the British issued a revised Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) that granted new powers, including judicial authority, to the political agents, the administrative officials who governed the tribal areas. The FCR also granted the political agents the magisterial power to institute a jirga of appointed tribal elders. The heavily armed and trained militants emerged as a third element in the FATA power structure. They neither adapted to nor have been accepted by either the tribal chiefs or the government. Until 2001, they had killed approximately 120 tribal elders on charges of being spies of the Pakistan government and/or Americans. See Faryal Leghari, "Dealing with FATA: Strategic Shortfalls and Recommendations", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, II(10) (July 2008). Further see Robert Lane Sammon, "Mullahs and Maliks: Understanding the roots of conflict in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas", April 2008, at <<http://lauder.wharton.upenn.edu/pdf/Robert%20Sammon%20-%20Lauder%20Thesis%20-%20April%202008.pdf>>. "Behind [the current instability] is the dismantling of a system of political control through the gradual destruction of legitimate political structures. Previously, the malik—the secular leader of the village or tribe—was the local political authority. He was elected by a jirga in the village and through an Islamabad-appointed political agent received government funds and handled relations with the state. The mulla—the local religious authority—was clearly subordinate, and in most cases completely apolitical. However, from the regime of General Zia ul-Haq onward, the state started to fund the mullas directly, giving them financial independence. Over the years the mullas took on an enhanced political role in the tribal community and gradually became more powerful than the malik. With new resources and status, the local religious figures were able to emerge."

<sup>14</sup> Ahmed S. Moussalli, "The Discourse of Hasan al-Banna on Shura, Democracy, and the Islamic State", *Moderate and Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Quest for Modernity, Legitimacy, and the Islamic State* 107 (1999).

ingredients in the deadly cycle of suicide killings that we now witness in Pakistan daily.<sup>15</sup>

A majority of Pakistanis are conservative yet moderate Muslims. They are conservative in that they wish to conserve religious tradition and practices in society as understood based on Islamic history and are not prepared for a critical debate on the virtues of secularism versus an Islamic way of life just yet. But they are moderate for they shun violence in the name of religion and reject any self-appointed protectors of the Islamic order acting in the name of God, determining what clothes to wear or what music not to listen to, or punishing people for sinful behaviour. In Pakistan society it is acceptable to judge people for sinful or promiscuous behaviour, but taking private action to cleanse others is not.<sup>16</sup>

Thus enforcement of stern morality by the Pakistani Taliban elicits widespread opposition. Yet it is argued that ideological commitment to violence or self-help in the name of religion is growing in Pakistan society. That might be true but the growing extremism is not explicable in terms of violent/intolerant religious ideology alone. This is only one factor that has galvanized minority religious groups in Pakistan. The other two factors are (i) an unpopular foreign policy of unconditional alignment with the Bush administration, and (ii) a crumbling system of governance that no longer provides security, public services or justice to the people.<sup>17</sup>

To the extent that the gripe and demands of the Pakistani Taliban and other extremist groups relate to corruption of public servants, extortion by the police and other issues of mal-governance, they resonate with those of the ordinary people. But such sympathy or understanding does not generate support for puritanical projects or militate against opposition to extremism and intolerance. The foremost problem confronting the Pakistani state is a moth-eaten system of governance and the rule by a regime that is stripping the state of its legitimacy. History teaches us that material comfort trumps ideology.

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<sup>15</sup> Babar Sattar, "Pakistan: Fault-lines under Khaki Rule", paper presented at *The State and Security Sector Reform and Governance Conference*, Manila, 23 January 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The issue of what role religion should play in the state is being addressed only by the *maulvis* – the madrassa and mosque preachers – who are consequently defining the nature of the debate. The government, political parties and civil society are steering clear of a meaningful conversation on Islam, as the substantive issues underlying the demands of the maulvi are considered too divisive. The opposition parties are also silent on issues of substance. While they point fingers at the government for continuing to fight America’s war in FATA,<sup>18</sup> they fail to present an alternative vision for how religion should interact with the state and society that will rid Pakistan of intolerance and extremism. To argue that the issues confronting Pakistan are those of governance, destitution and disempowerment alone and that the role of religion in the state is undisputed, is disingenuous.

First of all, there is the question whether the state should enforce or facilitate religion and what does creating Pakistan in the name of Islam mean. Should the state enforce Islam and all attendant religious obligations, thus removing any distinction between “sin” and crime? Should we have laws that make it obligatory for citizens to pray five times a day, for example, and prescribe jail-time or fines for derelicts? Or should the state facilitate religion to ensure that every person who wishes to practise his religion should be able to do so? If the former approach would make Pakistan an “Islamic state” and if it is desirable, then such a country is certainly not there and the extremist religious groups have a reason to protest. If the latter vision is preferable, then Pakistan’s existence as a Muslim country is not at peril as everyone who wishes to go to a mosque and perform other religious obligations is able to do so.

The role of religion in the state and society and who has the right to determine it are contentious issues that cannot be wished away. They affect the public and private lives of Pakistanis and need to be widely debated to develop a consensus on the basis of which the nation can develop a shared vision for its future. It is hard to deny that over the last two decades the Pakistan society has moved right of the centre. The change has been subtle but is unmistakable. There is nothing wrong with being religious or being inspired by faith. What is disturbing is the propagation of a brand of religion that is intolerant

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<sup>18</sup> *Fox News*, 13 September 2008.



and driven primarily by the desire to perpetuate primitive gender roles and concepts of chastity in the twenty-first century. An exclusive focus on rituals (as opposed to operationalizing underlying values such as justice and compassion) encourages bigotry, and that is the problematic aspect of the mullah's project to make our society seemingly righteous.

It is dangerous for the state to entertain a delusional belief that ideologically charged youth can be tamed when required. It is also dangerous for citizens who value their liberties to remain complacent toward intolerance, bigotry and obscurantism just because it is being practised in a different province or a different neighbourhood. Ideas are contagious, and defeating bad ideas is possible only in a society that offers individuals the right and freedom to challenge hallowed beliefs. The liberal forces in South Asia must continue to confront decadent beliefs and not be intimidated into acquiescing in retrogressive cultural traditions and etiquette.

### **The Misconceived Jihad Project**

Pakistan needs a consensual acceptance across its decision-making elites that the strategy of exporting jihad to realize geo-strategic goals was misconceived. As a matter of strategy a state cannot employ, arm and strengthen militants from amongst its own populace that it does not have firm control over to pursue its strategic objectives. All security agencies try to fish in troubled foreign waters and undertake covert operations. But to do so at the cost of your own medium- to long-term security is irresponsible.

The CIA was financially sponsoring the Afghan jihad,<sup>19</sup> but it did not set up jihadi training camps on its own territory or induct its own citizens into private militias. There is widespread perception in Pakistan that India's RAW (Research and Analysis Wing), similarly, might be supporting Baloch insurgents. Security agencies unfortunately play these dirty deadly games. But one cannot sensibly conceive and support a mass-scale covert operation wherein the militants are programmed to turn on the state itself should it decide to abandon the

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<sup>19</sup> Michel Chossudovsky, "Who Is Osama Bin Laden?", 12 September 2001, Centre for Research on Globalization; *The Guardian*, "Frankenstein the CIA Created", 17 January 1999.

project. This is what happened with the militants trained and equipped to wage jihad in Afghanistan and its fallout is the war the Pakistan Army is currently fighting in the north-west.

Pakistan must realize that there is no fundamental difference between the jihadis of yesteryears fighting in Afghanistan, those fighting against the Pakistan Army in the north-west today, or those fighting in Kashmir, to the extent that they are citizens of Pakistan trained in the art of violence. For one, supporting them is dangerous as once the genie is out of the bottle it cannot be put back in. Violent religious zeal, once proved, is hard to quell and a jihadist once commissioned to indulge in militancy at a tender age cannot be decommissioned should state policy change. More importantly, it is wrong. If employing and brainwashing an impressionable 15-year-old to carry out indiscriminate acts of violence against civilians of Pakistan is criminal, it is equally wrong to support sending that child to carry out attacks against civilians in India or the United States or even Israel.

The fight against terrorism that is claiming innocent civilian lives in Pakistan cannot be won without evolving a morally consistent position toward suicide bombing and religion-inspired violence more generally. And such consensus must be based on the principle that even the most noble and legitimate ends cannot justify impermissible means. This is not a debate about the legitimacy of the Kashmiri Muslims' right to self-determination or the validity or enforceability of UN resolutions underwriting such rights. This is a debate about the means that the Pakistani state should employ to support the righteous pursuit of rights by the Kashmiri people.

A policy of calling a 15-year-old a freedom fighter if he perpetrates violence against civilians on one side of the border and labelling him a terrorist if he blows himself up on the other side is neither sustainable nor morally consistent. Pakistan should not abandon the Kashmiri people in their just struggle, but it must not make their fight its own. It must instead focus on fighting the fires raging within. For sixty years the policymakers in India and Pakistan have used the bully pulpit to spew anger and hate against each other. It is about time the people of the subcontinent move beyond old suspicions and prejudices.

### **Need for Shared Regional Security Perspective**

As aforesaid, the insurgency in Pakistan is rooted in a diverse range of factors mostly of Pakistan's own making. However, the US invasion of Afghanistan and the continuing conflict on Pakistan's western border continues to catalyse and reinvigorate the insurgents in Pakistan's tribal belt. While much more can be done to contain the insurgency and its violent effects across Pakistan, it is unrealistic to hope that the fires of hate and vengeance raging in Pakistan's tribal areas can be put out without finding a lasting solution to the Afghan imbroglio.

Such a solution cannot be devised unless regional actors who have a stake and a role in Afghanistan – Pakistan, Iran and India – can develop a shared vision about the future of the country. Pakistan does not want a Northern Alliance-dominated, permanently antagonistic Afghanistan on its western border that could be used by India to fan separatist movements in the NWFP and Balochistan. Iran does not want the return of an obscurantist Taliban regime controlling Afghanistan that massacres the country's Shi'a minority and becomes a menace for Iran.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, India does not want an Afghanistan dominated by a Taliban-style regime that converts the country into Pakistan's backyard and fosters militants who wish to carry out jihad in Indian Kashmir.

And yet, a stable and sustainable government cannot be formed in Kabul unless it is pluralistic in nature and represents all stakeholders within Afghanistan, including the Taliban. If India and Iran continue to push for a Northern Alliance-controlled Afghanistan and Pakistan secretly wishes for the triumph and return of the Taliban, Afghanistan will continue to bleed, and so will Pakistan and the rest of the region. It is time for the regional actors to give up their Plans A and build consensus around a Plan B that is least threatening for all regional actors and is in the best interest of Afghanistan and its people.

There is a sense in Pakistan that India is providing financial and material support to insurgent groups fighting against Pakistan's armed forces in FATA. From a security perspective, "Pakistan perceives India seeking a 'strategic envelopment' – a policy of manipulating

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<sup>20</sup> *Time*, 28 September 1998.

events in Afghanistan and Iran to elicit anti-Pakistan responses so as to cause political and economic security problems for Pakistan.”<sup>21</sup> Pakistan also views with suspicion a number of Indian consulates set up in Afghanistan in provinces bordering Pakistan<sup>22</sup> – Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif – as well as India’s commitment to invest \$1.2 billion in Afghan reconstruction projects that makes it one of the largest donors to Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup> India and the Afghan government continue to blame Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) for orchestrating terrorist attacks within Afghanistan, including one on the Indian Embassy in Kabul on 6 July 2008 that killed forty-one persons, including two Indian diplomats.<sup>24</sup>

Iran, similarly, has an interest in ensuring that a friendly government is in charge of Afghanistan and that western Afghanistan remains its sphere of influence. It has remained a constant supporter of the Northern Alliance in its fight with the Taliban and not without reason. The Taliban were strongly hostile to Afghanistan’s Shi’a population during its regime and when they executed eight Iranian diplomats in Mazar-i-Sharif in August 1998, the two countries came very close to a war.<sup>25</sup> While Iran is loath to a permanent or extended US presence in Afghanistan, it is also bitterly opposed to a return of the Taliban. In view of the current strained relations between Kabul and Islamabad, Tehran is also using economic aid, support for reconstruction, trade and soft power levers to extend its influence over Afghanistan and is an important regional stakeholder in the future of the country.

Pakistan has had a tumultuous relationship with the Karzai government. Considering that Pakistan had a role in the evolution of the Taliban and was one of the few states that recognized the legitimacy of the Taliban regime, ever since the US invasion of Afghanistan the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been acrimonious and lacking in trust. Notwithstanding Pakistan’s security interest manifested in its strategic depth doctrine and the role and influence of the ISI during the Afghan jihad, Pakistan has legitimate stakes in the future of Afghanistan. It shares a 1601 km-

<sup>21</sup> Brigadier Feroz Hassan Khan, “Rough Neighbors: Afghanistan and Pakistan”, n. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, “Behind the Indian Embassy Bombing”, *The Atlantic Today*, 1 August 2008.

<sup>23</sup> *Ground Report*, 5 August 2008.

<sup>24</sup> *AFP*, 7 July 2008.

<sup>25</sup> See the report by Robert Frisk in *The Independent* on 4 September 1998. Available on <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/thousands-massacred-by-taliban-1195844.html> (last accessed 22 July 2009).

long porous border with Afghanistan that is still not permanent; Pashtun tribes that live across the Pak–Afghan Durand Line inhabit its north-western border area; and it still houses over a million Afghan refugees. Continuing conflict in Afghanistan or a permanent hostile regime in Kabul would thus continue to destabilize Pakistan, especially at a time when it is struggling to control a fierce insurgency driven by religious fervour and Pashtun nationalism wedded together.

Pakistan was born with an insecurity syndrome and its security policy has since been informed by the Indian threat. In the event that Pakistan and India succeed in evolving a congenial relationship, the rationale for Pakistan's interest – however misconceived – in acquiring strategic depth in Afghanistan or engaging with non-state combatants fighting in enemy territory or asserting its Islamic identity to distinguish itself from India, could melt away. The continuing Afghan war and the insurgency in Pakistan have thus thrown up a real challenge for regional peace due to the apparent conflicting interests of the regional actors. This challenge could be transformed into an opportunity for regional cooperation if Pakistan, India and Iran can step back from their operative strategies in Afghanistan and rethink their traditional security doctrines. However, such a review is possible only if the reconciliatory trend between Pakistan and India gains ground and saner voices gain ground, garner support and shape public opinion within the two countries.

A stable and sustainable government cannot be formed in Kabul unless it is pluralistic in nature and represents all stakeholders within Afghanistan, including the Taliban. If India and Iran continue to push for a Northern Alliance-controlled Afghanistan and Pakistan secretly aims for the triumph and return of the Taliban, Afghanistan will continue to bleed and so will Pakistan and the rest of the region. It is time for the regional actors to give up their Plans A and build consensus around a Plan B that is least threatening for all regional actors and is in the best interest of Afghanistan and its people. The continuing Afghan war and the insurgency in Pakistan have thrown up a challenge for regional peace that can be transformed into an opportunity for regional cooperation. This would require a rethink of the traditional security doctrines of Pakistan, India and Iran and the strategies deployed to pursue the perceived strategic interests. But it can be done.

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## **Nepal: In the Cusp of Change**

*Aditya Adhikari*

The paper intends to provide a broad outline of Nepal's peace process and the possible problems which can ruin the chances of its consolidation. It is obvious that Nepal's peace process has come a long way since the agreement was signed between the Parliamentary parties and the Maoists in November 2005 to start a movement against the king. Since then many events have taken place. There was a popular movement which brought down the government headed by the king on 24 April 2006 and forced the King to restore the House of Representatives.

There have been various agreements including the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Maoists and the Parliamentary parties. There has been an Interim Constitution that was adopted by the political parties and an interim government was formed including the Maoists. Elections to the Constituent Assembly were held in April 2008. The Maoists emerged as the largest party in the Assembly, with around a third of total seats. After five months of wrangling, a coalition government headed by the Maoists was formed.

The Constituent Assembly (CA) was supposed to draft a new constitution with the Maoist in the driver seat. In the aftermath of the elections, protracted negotiations amongst political parties led to the establishment of the government headed by the CPN-Maoist in August 2008. Before Maoists came to power, Nepal had become a republic with the abolition of the 240 year-old Monarchy by the CA on 28 May 2008. Regarded as an insurgent group only a couple of years back, the CPN-Maoist party led a coalition government in Nepal till May 2009, when Prime Minister Prachanda resigned over a conflict with the President, Ram Baran Yadav, over his decision to sack the head of the Nepalese army, Rookmangud Katawal. Ever since, another coalition led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) has assumed power. These were very far-reaching changes and in the past two years the movement towards peace has been very quick.

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The Constituent Assembly election, in a way, contributed towards providing greater political stability. Before the election, even when all these parties were working together, there was a fear that somehow the hard-earned political consensus might collapse resulting in the return of either the king or some kind of right wing parliamentary group or leader with the support of the army. That was the fear even up to a week before the elections.

But the elections held on 10 April 2008 proved all skeptics wrong. One must say that Nepal entered into a period of greater political stability.

It will be out of place here not to discuss the peace process in detail. A broad outline of the aims objectives of the peace process is necessary here. The primary objective of peace process for the old parliamentary parties was to bring an end to the civil war and to mainstream a far-left insurgent group into multi-party competitive politics. The Maoists entered the peace process as they understood that they had reached the limits of what they could achieve through military means. In their agreements with the old parties, they accepted the principles of multi-party democracy in return for promises for far reaching political and economic change.

However, when the process started after the signing of the agreement between the Maoists and Parliamentary parties, Nepal witnessed a great surge in the assertion of many ethnic groups across the country. Many ethnic groups who had been marginalized by the political centre for centuries had become politicized during the so-called people's war launched by the Maoists.

The Maoists themselves were responsible for raising ethnic consciousness, but interestingly quite, all these different ethnic groups felt that in the long run, the Maoist would not represent their interests. So Nepal witnessed revolts by various ethnic groups during the run off to the elections. But most important of them all was the one by the Madeshis who inhabit the southern part of Nepal in the Tarai region.

Thus the peace process, which began with the objective of mainstreaming the Maoists, had to contend with another important



objective of how to address the aspirations of different ethnic groups of Nepal. Due to increasing ethnic assertions, the political parties felt compelled to assure all ethnic groups their due representation in the centre. While drafting the new constitution, all these things will have to be addressed to bring lasting peace to Nepal.

There are parties who would argue that they would want true federalism in Nepal based on ethnic representation. They would advocate restructuring of the state, and especially the electoral system, to ensure due representation to all groups in terms of their share in the entire population. Provision of quotas for all ethnic groups and women in the CA would be an unparalleled experiment in the entire South Asia and uncommon for most parts of the world and Nepal is certain to face difficulties in resolving this issue in a constitutional way in the coming days.

There are other problems too, even though Nepalese politics is more stable than it was two or three years ago. There are still a number of key fault-lines where increased friction or tension can lead to a halt in if not collapse of the peace process. To illustrate that, one can take a close look at the Nepalese peace process at this critical juncture. Constituent Assembly has been elected. There is a new government at work. And two major tasks facing the new government are, (a) security sector reforms or more commonly integration of Maoist combatants and, (b) drafting of the new constitution.

### ***Integration of the Maoist cadres***

There UN mission in Nepal verified Maoist combatants and said that there were nearly 19000 genuine combatants who joined the actual peoples' war and they were over 18 at the time of verification. It is not clear as to what has to be done with these 19000 people. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2006 states that a Committee will be formed to inspect, integrate and rehabilitate Maoist combatants. The Maoists have been saying since the very beginning that the agreement clearly states reintegration of all 19000 of their PLA combatants into the Nepal army and given the designations due to them.

Nepalese Congress, the main political opponent of the Maoists these days do not subscribe to this interpretation. The people in the army plus people in important diplomatic missions (read India) say that this does not mean wholesale integration. It would rather mean rehabilitation of most of them with a few thousand Maoist combatants incorporated at very low level into the Nepal army. Others could be rehabilitated after being provided with due training in other security bodies like Border Security Force, Industrial Security Force etc.

Hence, there is a wide gap in the perceptions of the political parties. In fact, the agreement is quite vague and it was left deliberately vague because at the time of signing it the main architects of the agreement avoided controversies and disagreements. They were primarily concerned with ending violence and ushering in peace. There was a mutual consensus to postpone discussion on controversial issues to a future date.

The Nepali Congress, which is popularly believed to be backed by India, thought it wise not to talk about integration in any detail until the establishment of the Constituent Assembly. They had thought that the Maoists would fare badly in the Constituent Assembly elections and would not have the political leverage to bargain for their demands and they could do whatever we wanted. However, they were proved wrong.

The Maoists, on the other hand, did not talk about integration too much before the elections. They would rather rely on their standing army during the elections and hoped to push their agenda through after the elections using the issue as a bargaining chip. Many experts agree that it was a big mistake on the part of the political parties not to decide on the details of integration of the Maoist army before the elections. They would argue that with their good show in the elections and subsequent formation of government with Maoists at the helm, it is quite unlikely that they will go back on their demands for integration.

At one level, they are controlling the state but at another, they are entering into the peace process with their army still in tact. Their weapons are in the cantonment and they can get these out any time they want. Over the past two years, their army has only become more professional. They are the in cantonment and they exercise

every day. Hence, the experts would say that working out a consensus on the issue will be too difficult if not impossible.

However, even if a committee has been formed to look into the process of integration, there has been no movement at all and this has appeared as a major faultline in the peace process and the source of major disagreement between the Nepali Congress and the Maoists. The well-known opposition of the Nepali Army to the integration of Maoist cadres has continued to pose a challenge to the process. The view of the army leadership has been that the fighters cannot join the military because they are politically indoctrinated. The standoff between the Maoists and the army had to finally snowball into a controversy in early 2009.

The state of affairs had started getting complicated following a public controversy between Maoist Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa 'Badal' and the Chief of Army Staff Rookmangud Katawal in early 2009 over the latter's decision to recruit 2400 soldiers for the army. Later this stand-off culminated in the decision of the Maoist Prime Minister Prachanda to sack General Katwal in May 2009. This led to a controversy when the President Ram Baran Yadav overturned Prachanda's decision and called it "illegal and unconstitutional". The succeeding 22-party coalition government led by CPN-United Marxist Leninist (UML) is trying to grapple with the problem, while the Maoists are adopting a non-cooperative approach. The new government is yet to consolidate its position and has witnessed eight reshuffles within five months.

### ***Drafting the New Constitution***

The second major issue confronting the nation is the drafting of the new Constitution before May 2010. The CA has been formed and in its first meeting held in April 2008, it took a decision by an overwhelming majority to abolish the monarchy. After prolonged disagreement on the procedures to be adopted for the Assembly, deliberations started over the outline of the new constitution. So far, various subcommittees within the Assembly have been formed, and its members have been studying constitutions from other countries, and debating the nature of the new constitution. There is now a drive

to travel across the country to collect opinions from the people.

But the various public positions of the various parties – on issues such as federalism and state structure – are diametrically opposed to each other. There has in recent months been a breakdown in trust and communication between the Nepali Congress and the Maoists. It is difficult to see how a constitution can be drafted in this atmosphere. It is almost certain that the April deadline for the completion of the draft constitution will not be met.

The Nepali congress has not quite recovered from its electoral defeat at the hands of the Maoists. The elections revealed that it had serious ideological and organizational problems and it had to reform itself on a wholesale basis, to regain its support-base. There is also a deep grudge within the Nepali Congress against the Maoists. There is also a feeling of resentment and bitterness. So they may not play the role of a constructive opposition in the Constituent Assembly, which is the need of the hour.

They are going ahead with their unscathing attacks on the Maoists ever since the Maoists spurned NC's offer of coalition with Girija Prasad as President. They have alleged that the Maoist wished to impose an authoritarian government, and they did not want parliamentary democracy; that they want to establish a one party state and take over power ultimately and they are known for their double-speak, i.e., they would reject parliamentary democracy on the one hand and offer to accept multi-party democracy on the other.

The Maoists say that they have learnt their lessons from history. But after winning the elections, they have appeared to backtrack from their commitments to democracy. They have said that they would agree to participate in competitive politics, but only “anti-imperialist” and “anti-feudal” forces will be allowed to compete in the new state structure. Moreover, there is a faction within the party that still believes in hardcore Maoism, and has been advocating another armed revolt to take over the state structure. Such statements do not help gain the trust of other political forces. The Maoist approach to politics, ever since they left the government, has not been quite encouraging.

Maoists may not go back to war but they may face increasing

pressure from within not to give in too much in their negotiations over issues like integration, federalism and foreign policy. The hardliners think that by entering mainstream politics, the Maoists have compromised on their core ideology.



Apart from this, the ethnic diversity in Nepal has appeared as another important factor in Nepalese politics. Ethnic politics is also becoming more assertive day by day. The new phenomenon of rise of militant non-state actors in the Tarai belt poses a new problem in this context. There are at least 12 to 14 of them operating in this area with various demands ranging from total independence to federal administration — who claim to represent the people of the Terai region. They are engaged in all kinds of nefarious activities, i.e., murder, extortion and criminal activities across the Tarai. They were prominent before the elections and sought to spread their message through violence. They would champion the interests of the Madheshis and vow to resolve their problems through violence.

There is a view that the Madheshi people seem to have learnt their lessons and the method of violence may not appeal to them any more. Even then, Madheshi people do have their grievances and do not have any hope in the CA. As there is increasing disillusionment towards the mainstream Madheshi parties, these radical forces are likely to stay alive.

There is still tension brewing up between the minority ethnic groups and large parties. These tensions can intensify in the months to come and if the parliamentary Madheshi parties go to the streets to protest, these armed groups will have a role to play in the changing political context in Nepal.

In the past, there have been cases where Madheshi parties have used the support of armed groups to escalate violence and even though they are lying low now there is a possibility of their reemergence in future.

In sum, the peace process has moved very fast and led to an elected CA. However, there are fears that the process may not be able to sustain itself. The Maoists may go astray and disrupt the process, even if it looks pretty far-fetched at the moment. There are



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also fears that there may be a whole new range of non state actors, championing the cause of different ethnic groups, asserting their hold over large tracts of Nepal where the state has minimal presence. This is quite possible because the morale of the police is really low, because the police consists of a particular Hill ethnic group which is seen as an oppressor class by many in Nepal. They have been sent, on many occasions, to crackdown on ethnic movements. Now they may be at the receiving end with the possibility of ethnic insurgencies gaining ground day by day.

Also worrisome is the instability of the coalition government led by Madhav Kumar Nepal and the attitude of the Maoists. This may have major ramifications for the peace process. The nominal stability that Nepal has today may soon wither away if the political parties responsible for governance of the state fail to overcome their differences and tackle the crucial areas of the peace process.

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## India and Its Neighbours\*

*N. Ravi*

We in Ministry of External Affairs follow the proceedings in all Track-II events with great interest, particularly when they are held in India, and especially when it concerns India's neighbourhood, because we believe that India's progress is inexorably linked with the progress of its neighbours. India seeks to promote peace and stability in the region because that is likely to accelerate India's socio-economic development and safeguard its national security. This policy aims at ensuring a peaceful periphery to enable India to pursue its own development as well as development of other states in the region. However this goal is not easy to achieve. Internal developments in the neighbourhood, cross border issues, ethnic problems and issues related to migration continue to pose complex challenges for regional cooperation.

India lays a lot of stress on economic integration and it is working bilaterally through unilateral gestures and asymmetrical economic concessions to integrate its immediate neighbours into its economy. India's rapid growth during the last two decades offers an opportunity to accelerate this process and to work towards economic interdependence among the states in the region. A critical element in India's long-term strategy of economic integration with its neighbours is the development of border infrastructure which can facilitate faster movement of goods and people across the borders. The Government of India is in the process of setting up as many as 12 to 15 border integrated check-posts covering all the countries surrounding India and each of these check-posts will be complete with all required formalities like customs, immigration, warehousing, quarantine, communication, banking and so on.

In fact, the relatively porous land borders of South Asian states have led to the illegal movement of people across the borders and the political and economic consequences of such movement have been enormous. India is also seeking to improve border management, and

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\* Adapted from the Valedictory Address at the International Seminar on "Changing Political Context in South Asia and Prospects of Security and Regional Cooperation", 6 November 2008.

put in place a system, particularly in the border districts, which will make boundaries a reality with adequate mechanisms to monitor and, where necessary, regulate illegal movement of people across borders. It is in the interest of other states in the neighbourhood to adopt such a policy too. Given the cross-border compulsions and cross border incentives, depending upon which way one looks at it, regulation of borders is an important issue that should be given adequate attention.

Terrorism remains a scar for the region and the recent attacks across India only reflect the extent to which terror-networks have spread throughout the country and the region. The roots of this terrorist activity lie unmistakably in the neighbourhood. India continues to work with and persuade its neighbours to ensure that they do not provide support to terrorist activities in any form. In case of Pakistan, the levels of cooperation that we receive from it have varied depending upon the willingness of the Pakistani government to be responsive to our requests.

Let us discuss India's relations with its neighbours on bilateral basis. Its relations with Afghanistan have improved during the recent years. India continues to help reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. It is assisting the Afghan government and Afghan people in building a stable democratic and pluralistic society. Afghanistan, under the leadership of President Hamid Karzai, remains engaged in this very difficult task in an extremely complex situation. India's investment in the multifaceted cooperation efforts in Afghanistan is well over 1 billion US dollars.

As regards Pakistan, India has highlighted, in bilateral discussions, its concerns regarding the continuing attempts at cross-border infiltration. It has emphasized that the dialogue process is based on three pillars, i.e., (i) it must be conducted in an environment which is free from terrorism and violence or the threat to use violence; (ii) both the countries should be prepared to discuss all issues of mutual concern; and (iii) they should attempt to build a normal bilateral and cooperative relationship. Terrorism is the biggest challenge confronting both the countries. It is true that the issue of terrorism is extremely complex and it is deeply enmeshed with internal politics of Pakistan and the role played by several agencies in facilitating terror in the neighbourhood. Given such a scenario, India continues to engage



Pakistan in institutional dialogues not in expectation of a major movement forward but to ensure that all sections that influence state policy in Pakistan work in favour of maintaining good relations with India. In this context, the meetings at the highest levels have been quite helpful. The President, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan as well as senior politicians like the former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif have publicly stated their commitment to developing a bilateral relationship.

There has been, without doubt, a historic change in Nepal in the last two years. India has had a very useful interaction with the new political leadership of Nepal and agreed to work towards further strengthening the unique and special bilateral partnership that both the countries have for years. Major elements of this continued effort would include issues related to security and economic cooperation. There should be bilateral efforts to develop border infrastructure, hydel-power projects and take flood relief measures as well as focus on trade and transit issues.

India looks at the advent of democracy in Bhutan as a welcome development which demonstrates the importance that the people of Bhutan attach to representative system of governance. Bhutan has successfully transformed itself into a constitutional monarchy with a new king and an elected Prime Minister. India revised its treaty of friendship with Bhutan in 2007 to accommodate Bhutanese concerns and take bilateral relations to a higher level. India has very close economic cooperation with Bhutan and the two governments have a plan to produce up to 25000 MW of hydro-electric power by 2020 in Bhutan, for both domestic use and export to India. The commissioning of 1020 MW Tala Hydro Electric power plant in Bhutan in 2008 and the signing of an agreement for Mangdue Chu hydro-electric power plant are symbols of the depths of India's cooperation with Bhutan.

India has made significant progress in its bilateral relationship with Bangladesh during the last two years. It has laid emphasis on promotion of connectivity and started Dhaka-Calcutta Passenger train service and a new air service agreement to increase flights between our two countries in April 2008. India is also undertaking several initiatives to improve the trade infrastructure including the opening up of new land custom stations (on the Kolkata-Petropole road) and

development of the rail and river routes which would help facilitate trade. India is also planning to establish joint check-posts to help nationals of both countries to use the main channels of rivers wherever the boundary runs through the midstream. India looks forward to intensify its relations with Bangladesh across all sectors in future.

Myanmar is India's first land border with the ASEAN. In line with India's 'look east policy' and its commitment to develop the north-eastern region several cross-border development projects are being taken up with Myanmar. These include roads connecting Mizoram and Manipur with Myanmar. The finalization of the agreement on the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project which would link Kolkata by road to Sittwe in Myanmar and pass through Mizoram. It envisages development of a 225 km waterway on the river Kaladan, upgradation of the ports and construction of two roadways. The enhancement of India-Myanmar bilateral trade is a major objective and this is being promoted by converting existing cross-border trade stations into normal trade stations and by facilitating measures such as construction of integrated check-posts, land customs stations at two places on the India-Myanmar border. To secure India's energy interests, it has also signed production-sharing contracts for off-shore deep water blocks with Myanmar in September 2007. While pursuing bilateral ties with Myanmar, India has impressed upon the Myanmar government that the process of national reconciliation and political reforms initiated by the government of Myanmar should be taken forward expeditiously and it should be broad-based to include all sections of society including Aung San Suu Kyi and various ethnic groups. India's 'look east' policy goes beyond Myanmar. India has tried to have countries from the region included in multilateral forums like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) which comprises of countries India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka. India also values its relationship with Thailand which is a maritime neighbour of India. BIMSTEC countries have identified many areas of common concern like trade, tourism, energy, weather, climate change, disaster management, and they have shown their inclination to work both at bilateral and multilateral levels on these issues.

India's relationship with Sri Lanka has undergone a qualitative transformation during the last decade. The two countries have pledged

to work together in the area of trade, investment, connectivity and developmental projects. Sri Lankan Airlines has established a record in the number of flights (more than 120) they operate per week to various cities in India. This in itself shows how closely linked the people of the two countries are and that tourism is certainly a major driver in this regard. Ever since the India-Sri Lanka free trade agreement entered into force in March 2000, India has emerged as the largest trade partner of Sri Lanka in the SAARC region. The two way trade between the two countries rose to 3.3 billion US dollars in 2007 out of which, Indian exports accounted for about 2.8 billion. India has also become the fourth largest investor in Sri Lanka and to further consolidate these linkages both sides have progressed significantly on the text of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. While these movements are going on India has also expressed to the government of Sri Lanka its concern at the continued ethnic problem and made it clear that it supports a negotiated political settlement to the problem and this would have to be based on credible devolution package within a framework of an undivided Sri Lanka.

While pursuing bilateral relations with each of the countries in the region across different sectors, India has also tried to utilize SAARC to realize its aim of economic integration. During 2007-2008, as the Chairman of SAARC, India put emphasis on concrete regional initiatives, moving from declaratory to implementation phase, keeping in view the need to have better intra-regional physical, economic and people to people connectivity. Several initiatives have been launched in this regard. One of them is the proposed establishment of the South Asia University in Delhi. Land has been identified and this will hopefully attract the future generations of students, researchers and professors who would evolve frameworks for cooperation for countries of the region in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such an educational initiative may attract all the people across various universities and academic institutions in different countries to come together and look at the future with faith in themselves and lay the foundations of a brighter future for regional cooperation.

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