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AFGHANISTAN SPECIAL

**Taliban and the Afghanistan Problem,
1996-2001: Role of the UN**

C.S.R. Murthy

**Advent of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan:
US Policy Examined**

Apratim Mukarji

**Strategic Significance of Afghanistan
after the Cold War**

Umashankar

**The Afghanistan Crisis:
Problems and Prospects of Peace**

Seminar Report by Manmath Narayan Singh

HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

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Editor's Page

Located at the crossroads of Central, South and West Asia and sharing its borders with Central Asia on the north, Chinese province of Xinjiang in the east, Iran on the west and south west, and Pakistan and Pak-occupied Kashmir on the south and south east, Afghanistan occupies a unique geostrategic placement in the region. In the post-cold war period which witnessed the demise of USSR, establishment of an Islamic state and the rise of Taliban, Afghanistan has remained at the centre stage of regional and international politics. The Taliban enforced their extremist religious and socio-political agenda and turned Afghanistan into the hub of arms and drugs trafficking and international terrorism with Osama bin Laden using it as the base of Al Qaeda and other Islamist terrorist outfits. All efforts to persuade the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden proved futile. The threat posed by Osama bin Laden and the Taliban to world peace and security was universally recognised and UN sanctions were imposed against the Taliban. Undaunted by international criticism the Taliban unleashed atrocities against women, children, ethnic-religious minorities and political opponents, thereby deepening the internal divide in Afghanistan, besides violating the basic human rights of Afghans. The UN and other international peace initiatives made no headway in the face of determined Taliban opposition to share power with rival Afghan groups. Afghanistan remained fractured and turbulent country posing great challenge to peace and security in the region.

Osama bin Laden and his network played a key role in the terrorist attacks in South Asia, Central Asia, South East Asia and also in the west. However, it was only after the spectacular and dreadful suicidal terrorist strikes on World Trade Centre and Pentagon, that is the commercial and military nerve centres of the United States, which resulted in the collapse of the twin towers of the WTC with thousands of casualties, that the United States and its western allies realised the severity of challenge posed by bin Laden, Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The United States mustered sufficient political will to lead the global war against terrorism. The US-led forces have severely mauled the Taliban and the Al Qaeda, destroyed much of their military machine, bases, training camps etc. At the same time the international community, by the December 5, 2001 Bonn Agreement

committed itself to the task of starting the process of establishing permanent government institutions and protecting human security in Afghanistan. With 2.4 billion dollar aid pledged at the January 2002 International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan held in Tokyo, new hope has dawned for building accountable national institutions and infrastructure in Afghanistan that has been destroyed during the over two decades of war and fighting.

Even after the Taliban appear to have been vanquished, elements of Al Qaeda network still exist both within and outside Afghanistan. Leaders and thousands of supporters of Al Qaeda and the Taliban militia have shifted to Pakistan. In March 2002, 65 Al Qaeda terrorists were arrested in Faisalabad and Lahore during the joint operations conducted by Pakistani and US security agencies. There have been sporadic attacks by the Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters on the US and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kandahar, Gardez and Kabul. Over two-thirds of the 2000 activists belonging to *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen*, *Jaish-e-Mohammad*, *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen* and others who were arrested after Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf's January 12, 2002 address have since been released. So ensuring sustainable security and peace in Afghanistan is a great challenge facing the international community. This can be achieved only by total elimination of Al Qaeda network and their supporters operating in various parts of the world.

There has been a total collapse of all social and economic structures in Afghanistan particularly under the Taliban. Agriculture, industry, trade, handicrafts, monetary system, education, health care, all have been in shambles. The reconstruction of collapsed social and economic infrastructure in Afghanistan has to follow along several lines simultaneously, as stated below :

- (a) Creating a viable infrastructure for school, secondary, technical and adult education for imparting modern, secular and scientific education to children, youth as well as illiterate adults in addition to creating a cadre of skilled workers and professionals in various medical engineering and other technical subjects. For this the old curriculum based on fundamentalist/extremist model needs to be revised and changed urgently.

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- (b) Create a well trained police and peace keeping force representative of various ethnic groups and regions of Afghanistan- Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen etc., to maintain law and order in the country.
 - (c) Evolving a set of Civil and Criminal laws and regulations based on general practice world wide and in tune with international humanitarian law.
 - (d) Restoration of indigenous historico-cultural heritage, revival of local traditions and popular knowledge, customs, music, rituals, festivals, arts, crafts, architecture and monuments, will greatly help the Afghans get back the cultural basis of their identity and self-understanding.
 - (e) Restoration and building of irrigation channels, waterways and check-dams will help revive the agriculture and horticulture, besides providing gainful employment to the Afghans in the countryside.
 - (f) Clearing the fields of mines and also defusing the cluster bombs scattered all around, is yet another problem that needs to be tackled on priority.
 - (g) Need to make poppy cultivation, transportation and processing of opium, drugs and arms trafficking a criminal offense in Afghanistan liable for punitive action, at the same time giving alternative rural developments programmes.

The reconstruction programme as discussed above will help in putting the social and economic situation in Afghanistan back on tracks, though the process is cumbersome and long drawn. International agencies like United Nations, World Bank, European Union etc. need to implement the reconstruction programmes employing professional and committed cadres in coordination with the local agencies/personnel. Air Dropping of dollars/ cash or injecting lot of money instead of rebuilding the education system, health care, agriculture, trade and services will not be productive.

The future of Afghanistan with guarantees of peace, security and well being of its people hinges upon the success of the de-Talibanisation process, the success of reconciliation between rival ethnic/regional Afghan political groups, emergence of a broad-based stable government representing diverse ethnic, regional and minority interests, the setting up and effective functioning of law enforcement agencies, on the speedy implementation of reconstruction of social, economic and education infrastructure, and on elimination of drugs and arms trafficking from Afghanistan.

K. Warikoo

Taliban and the Afghanistan Problem, 1996-2001: Role of the UN

C.S.R. Murthy

Although the United Nations has been concerned at several aspects of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan right from September 1996 onwards, the scenario arising from the terrorist attacks on targets in the United States on 11 September 2001 has, in the words of the UN Secretary-General, “altered the Afghan landscape irrevocably . . . offering a fresh opportunity to tackle the problem to which, only a few months ago, there appeared to be no solution”.¹ These developments leading to the removal of the Taliban from power and its replacement by an internationally recognized anti-Taliban interim government under the terms of the UN-brokered agreement signed at Bonn on 5 December 2001 have revived the hopes of success to the efforts of the United Nations to bring peace to the people of Afghanistan through establishment of a broadly based, democratic and progressive government.

The United Nations activities to help reconstruction of the war-torn Afghanistan and reconciliation between the Taliban and the anti-Taliban factions ruthlessly engaged in civil war have not borne fruit during the past five years. Indeed, much of the post-Soviet troop withdrawal history of Afghanistan witnessed incessant armed campaigns among the ethnically exclusive factions of *mujahideen*, some of which forcibly seized power and foisted a horrendous reign of heart-rending misery and suffering on the mass of innocent Afghans. This trend was predominant most during the Taliban era ever since they captured Kabul from the hands of the Northern Alliance in September 1996. The civil war in the northern areas of Afghanistan involving Taliban on the one side and a motley alliance of military resistance called Supreme Council for the Defence of Afghanistan - renamed in June 1997 as the United Islamic Salvation Front of Afghanistan was devastating in its impact. During the

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five years of the Taliban rule, nearly three million men, women and children were killed. Two million were maimed, while seven million or more were uprooted from their homes to seek refuge abroad or elsewhere in the country. Twenty cities were turned into rubble, and allegedly more than 600 mosques were destroyed ironically by fighters who claim to live and die for Islam.² Every element of infrastructure – power, transport, and communications – was destroyed beyond repair. With agriculture becoming nonviable, deprivation and starvation became common. Social services like health care and education facilities ceased to function. In short, a generation has grown up with no experience of normal life.

In what forms has the Afghanistan situation during the Taliban era become a serious concern to the United Nations? What kinds of activities has the UN taken up to mitigate the human suffering and restore normalcy in that country? What factors have impinged on those activities of the United Nations? How have the post-September 11, 2001 developments spelled a challenge and an opportunity to the United Nations in Afghanistan? While addressing these questions, this paper will attempt to evaluate the recent remarks by the prestigious Nobel Committee, while announcing award of the peace prize to United Nations and its Secretary-General, Kofi Annan jointly, that “the only route to global peace and cooperation goes by way of the United Nations”³. The discussion focuses on four facets of the UN engagement, viz. rendering emergency relief and humanitarian help, upholding of human rights standards, promotion of political reconciliation, and attempting to punish through targeted sanctions for refusing to hand over those harbouring terrorism. Before that, the general policy framework endorsed by the UN, its principal structures of engagement and the Taliban attitude towards the UN need to be paid attention briefly.

PARAMETERS OF UN ROLE

The United Nations has a natural claim for a neutral and facilitative role by sheer virtue of its long and rich experience in conflict management and resolution. All principal political organs of the United Nations got closely involved in suitably responding to developments in Afghanistan.

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For example, the Security Council and the General Assembly, together, have adopted 19 resolutions mostly either unanimously or by consensus during the five year period coinciding with the Taliban rule. These resolutions urged (a) all warring factions to cease hostilities forthwith (b) all States to strictly refrain from any outside interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan (c) an end to supply of arms, ammunition, military equipment to the warring factions from outside (d) all parties fulfil their obligations and commitments regarding the safety of UN personnel and other international personnel as well as their premises in Afghanistan, and (e) the Secretary-General to investigate reports of mass killings of prisoners of war and civilians and also incidents of rape.⁴ Repeated calls were addressed particularly to the Taliban authorities to cease immediately all armed hostilities to renounce the use of force and to engage, without delay or precondition, in a political dialogue under United Nations auspices, aimed at achieving a lasting political settlement of the conflict by creating a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative government, which would protect the rights of all Afghans and observe the international obligations of Afghanistan.⁵ Many of them were massively sponsored in the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly the resolution on Afghanistan was co-sponsored by as many as 87 member governments.

To carry forward the wishes of the membership and the mandate of the principal organs, the Secretary-General had established in 1994 the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA). Since 1996 three experienced diplomats were named to head UNSMA and to serve as the Secretary-General's personal representative. They were Norbert Henrich Holl of Germany (from 1996-97), Lakhdar Brahimi of Algeria (1997-1999 and again since October 2001), and Francesc Vendrell of Spain from February 2000 onwards. Brahimi as "special representative" had "an overarching authority over all United Nations activities in Afghanistan, providing guidance and direction to ensure overall coordination and coherence of action". UNSMA had three jobs to do: first, monitor and report political and military developments in Afghanistan, secondly align with the United Nations Office for Coordinator of

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Humanitarian Activities (UNOCHA) as well as the indigenous and international humanitarian assistance community, and finally promote peace through contact with the two Afghan warring sides as well as through the wider Afghan political and civil community.⁶ Military observers and advisers who in the process incurred nine fatalities discharged the task of monitoring and reporting of the military developments. Aside from the military component, UNSMA had a civilian affairs unit to monitor violations of human rights and promote respect for minimum humanitarian standards.⁷ It goes without saying that UNSMA's civilian and military monitoring role was frequently marked by lack of cooperation from the Taliban authorities. UNSMA officials barely had working relationship with the Taliban; the point man in Kabul was the Taliban Foreign Minister, Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil. The UNSMA was forced to close its offices in May 2001 as a fall out of the imposition of specially targeted sanctions imposed by the UN six months earlier.

The primary problem UNSMA faced in dealing with the Taliban authorities arose from the latter's lack of confidence in the United Nations ability to be fair and impartial. The origins of the UN-Taliban tension go back to 1996 when the General Assembly refused to grant legitimacy to the new regime by letting its delegation occupy the Afghanistan seat in the UN. In fact, a vast majority of members favoured the rival delegation, sent by the deposed regime headed by President Rabbani. Allies of the Taliban like Pakistan contended that the claim of the Taliban could not be brushed aside as they controlled much of the Afghan territory. If the Taliban could not be seated, it was argued, the UN should have followed the even-handed approach of the Organization of Islamic Conference, viz. keeping the Afghanistan seat vacant so that all the parties trust the UN in its humanitarian and other activities. These pleas did not receive support in the Security Council either.⁸ Throughout the Taliban era, the resolutions adopted by the Council were described by the Taliban regime as biased and therefore did "not augur well for the image of the United Nations, or of the Security Council for that matter, as an impartial player".⁹ On its part, the UN also acknowledged that the Taliban did "not accept the United Nations as an impartial intermediary".¹⁰

Osama bin Laden desperately sought to cement the distrust and placed the troubled relationship as part the world body's role as an "instrument of crimes against Muslims".¹¹ Notably, however, that criticism made to galvanize opposition from the Islamic countries to the relentless bombing by the US-led military coalition against the terrorist camps of the Saudi outlaw did not carry much credibility. It is in this generally uncongenial atmosphere that offices of the UN bodies dealing with humanitarian and political assistance were allowed to operate sporadically with perennial threats to physical safety as also functional autonomy.

FOUR FACETS OF UN ROLE

The UN role in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule may be summed up under four heads, viz. the provision and coordination of emergency relief and humanitarian assistance, disapproval of gross violation of human rights especially of women, imposition of sanctions against Taliban to ensure latter's cooperation on issues of terrorism, and finally the efforts aimed to help political reconciliation among rival factions.

1. Emergency Relief and Humanitarian Assistance

Foremost among the four pillars of UN activities is the provision of emergency relief and humanitarian assistance to the Afghans on different counts. During the period of Taliban rule, Afghans became victims of not only the civil war, but also natural disasters like earthquakes, floods and droughts in different parts of the country. A UN spokesperson once described Afghanistan as "one of the worst places in the world to try to live". As per the estimates of December 2001, 6 million or one-fourth of the Afghan population – faced humanitarian crisis and needed immediate foreign aid for survival. The UN humanitarian activities covered a number of problems, but the discussion here briefly covers only four major concerns: repatriation of refugees, food aid, mine clearance, and control of drug abuse.

One of the major humanitarian problems that arose out of the Afghanistan problem pertained to the Afghan refugees, bulk of whom sought asylum in Pakistan and Iran. The international community had

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two choices either continue to support these refugees stranded outside, or assist them to return home in safety and with dignity. Although the post-Soviet Afghanistan faced prolonged civil war with attendant deterioration in the human rights situation, according to UNHCR estimates, approximately 4.5 million returned home so far. This estimate included some 200,000 Afghans voluntarily repatriated from both Iran and Pakistan during 2000-2001. In the post-Taliban scenario, nearly 2.5 million refugees were reported waiting to return to Afghanistan in safety and with dignity. Ironically enough, this single largest caseload of refugees emerged as one of the most cash strapped refugee programmes of UNHCR.¹² Also, difficulties arose in the host countries too. In 1998-99, approximately 90,000 Afghan refugees were forced by the Iranian government to return despite inhospitable and unsafe conditions in Afghanistan at that time, because of what was cited as public pressure and worsening economy.¹³ Under international pressure, Iran relented later. As the figures for 1999 showed, while 80,000 refugees returned from Pakistan, only a few thousand returned from Iran.¹⁴ Subsequently Iran agreed to end forcible deportation and commit itself only to voluntary repatriation of 1.4 million refugees left behind. Furthermore, UNHCR secured the power to ensure that repatriation was indeed voluntary, not a forced one.¹⁵ Pakistan too turned unreceptive by closing its border with Afghanistan occasionally, the latest such measure taken in the wake of the Taliban-US stand off on the terrorism issue in September 2001. And yet, it was tentatively estimated that nearly 100,000 Afghans crossed over to Pakistan during September-October 2001. Allied to the refugee problem is the phenomenon of people displaced within Afghanistan. At least two million were uprooted, often forcibly, from their homes and villages due to heavy shelling, torching of houses, burning of crops, and destruction of infrastructure. Camps were established to house the internally displaced persons and returning refugees, in Kabul, Panjsher, Bamiyan, Herat and Kunduz.¹⁶

Emergency relief by the UN food aid agency, the World Food Programme (WFP) saved many Afghan lives from starvation. In the course of the conflict between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, several

parts of northern Afghanistan were subjected to trade bans and loots. It was on such occasions that the food aid channelled by the WFP became a critical intervention. For instance, in the midst of resumed hostilities in Hazarajat region in November 1997, WFP assisted 160,000 vulnerable individuals with 4,000 tons of food aid. However, the WFP's attempts to bring in food to a traditional food-deficit region of Hazarajat from the north were thwarted by the ethnic strife as well as the looting of warehouses in Mazar-e-Sharif and Hairaton regions.¹⁷ In all, some 1.4 million Afghans were supported by WFP during 1997, with a total food allocation of 120,000 tons throughout Afghanistan on the basis of people-oriented, community-based programmes. In 1998 through its bakery project WFP supported some 800,000 of the most vulnerable Afghans. This project was implemented through the year in Kabul and Jalalabad, whereas in Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif and Faizabad only for shorter duration.¹⁸ In addition, the WFP delivered emergency supplies and food to victims of the earthquake which struck northern Afghanistan twice (measuring 6.1 and 6.9 on the Richter scale respectively) in 1998. In the wake of the first one in February, WFP and its partner agencies provided 19.5 metric tons of food as well as other relief comprising medicines, blankets, tents and cooking stoves in the Takhar province.¹⁹ Additionally, the WFP brought wheat from Tajikistan and used it to pay men for reconstruction of more than 14,000 earthquake resistant homes in Badakshan and Takhar provinces. Relief work to the victims of second quake which hit in May the same year was severely affected with the Taliban authorities refusing to cooperate after the air strikes by the United States in August 1998 against the suspected terrorist bases in Afghanistan.²⁰ In 1999, WFP arranged for more than 14,000 metric tons of food to over 350,000 people in the districts of central highlands and Badakshan.²¹ During the period July 2000-June 2001, 136,000 tons of wheat was supplied to 3.2 million drought-affected people.²² A poor harvest for the third successive year necessitated relief for 5.5 million Afghans as on September 2001, as aid was required by three million in rural areas alone.²³ Despite the manifold obstacles faced by the WFP after the start of the US-led multi-national military operations in October 2001 to terminate the Taliban rule, the officials claimed to

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have supplied 52,000 metric tons of food aid – enough to feed six million Afghans.²⁴

Afghanistan accounted for two-thirds of the 60 million landmines found in various conflict areas in the whole world. These mines constituted the single largest cause of death and disability to nearly 2 million Afghans. The mine action programme (MAPA) managed by the UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) with a work force of 4,800 focussed its energies on four components of its mandate: mine awareness, minefield survey and marking, mine clearance training and mine clearance. Eighteen provinces were covered by the mine clearance and minefield survey operations from four regional offices in Afghanistan. The task of detection and clearance of these mines by the United Nations and several non-governmental organizations became very slow in the absence of maps showing where they were planted, a standard military practice followed in inter-state conflicts. As per the latest figures, approximately 550 sq. kilometers were cleared of mines and over 7 million Afghans were trained in mine awareness. Alongside, 1.6 million explosive devices were defused rendering farmlands and residential areas safe.²⁵ Innovative efforts were undertaken to expand the level of mine-awareness training available to women and girls, including training at health clinics, local mine-awareness committees and husband and wife training teams.²⁶ UNOCHA served as an umbrella organization for four international NGOs and nine Afghan non-governmental organizations. Notable among the international ones were the HALO Trust, Save the Children Fund USA, and Handicap International.²⁷

Although Afghanistan had emerged as a known centre for illicit production of opium, ethnic conflict in the country compounded the problem, thus being a matter of great concern to the world community. According to a UN International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) survey in 1996, around 57,000 hectares were under poppy cultivation generating over \$60 million in annual income, much of which was suspected to be used for purchase of weapons. The survey for 1997 revealed a 25 per cent increase over 1996 in the opium poppy production, despite a decree by the Taliban banning the production of opium and

poppy. It was also reported that 96.4 per cent of Afghanistan's total opium production originated in provinces currently under Taliban control.²⁸ In 1999, it was estimated that the opium production reached a record level of 4,600 metric tons, which could potentially be converted into 460 metric tons of heroin showing a 43 per cent increase over 1998 level.²⁹ Not merely that the revenues generated by the illicit drug trade was financing the conflict, but at the same time the countries in the neighbourhood and beyond began to be severely affected.³⁰ In 1998, worldwide drug seizures that involved opium originating from Afghanistan were reported to be in the range of 600 metric tons. To combat the problem, the UNDCP developed an integrated programme of assistance for the years 1997-2001 comprising four projects aimed at capacity building for drug control, drug control monitoring system, poppy crop reduction, demand reduction support and law enforcement. A decrease of 47 per cent in poppy cultivation was reported in the four targeted areas when the programme was closed for lack of funds in 2001.³¹ With the help of UNDCP, the Taliban dismantled some 34 heroin-processing laboratories in Nagarhar province.³² After implementation of the opium poppy ban issued by Mullah Omar in July 2000, a sharp reduction of its cultivation by 91 per cent was reported.³³

On yet another front, about 7.5 million Afghans were estimated to live in areas with no access to health services. Children became the worst victims in this situation. Close to 300,000 died every year in the past two decades due to preventable diseases. During the first half of 1997, WHO and UNICEF, in collaboration with Ministry of Public Health, other UN agencies and non-governmental organizations, implemented two rounds of national immunization days against poliomyelitis, a crippling disease which was responsible for about two thirds of the disabilities in Afghanistan. During this campaign, 3.6 million children aged 5 and under, or 90 per cent of the targeted population, received two supplementary doses of oral polio vaccine covering 310 out of 330 districts. This unprecedented coverage was possible with the deployment of over 13,000 health workers, volunteers, teachers, mullahs and community leaders in the organization and conduct of the campaign.³⁴

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As late as in October 2000, both the Taliban and their rival side suspended fighting to allow vaccination of 5.3 million children against polio, as previously scheduled.³⁵ Remarkably these drives continued unaffected even during the anti-Taliban military strikes in October 2001.

In sum, the UN humanitarian relief activities helped repatriate 4.5 million refugees, provide food aid to hungry masses, clear hundreds of square kilometres littered with land mines. The record could and should have done better, if it had not faced serious financial and operational constraints. As for the finances, the UN system received less than adequate support from the donor community to the consolidated appeals issued. Reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly graphically depicted the persistence of resource deficit. For example, the United Nations consolidated appeal for emergency humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan sought in 1997 US\$ 133 million, but the sum actually received up to the middle of the year constituted only 29 per cent of the requirement (\$38 million). Again in 1998 only \$54 million were contributed or pledged, representing 35 per cent of the required \$157 million.³⁶ In October 2001, UN issued appeals for \$654 million but received only \$358 million for aiding the survival of 7.5 million people. It is a moot point whether wide interest in the recent turn of events translates into greater responsiveness on the part of the donor community.

Equally important was the interference and intimidation by the Taliban authorities that impeded the UN work in emergency/humanitarian relief. As Kofi Annan pointed out in a different context recently, humanitarian disasters very often had political causes and humanitarian action produced political effects.³⁷ The intermittent outbreak of fighting and its attendant political uncertainty generated suspicion within the Taliban quarters about the motives and activities of relief workers in the country. As part of the fighting in Mazar-e-Sharif in May-September 1997, UN offices were ransacked and the UN withdrew from all of northern Afghanistan except in Hazarajat.³⁸ The Taliban took recourse to arrests, abduction and even physical elimination. The ruling establishment refused to deal with the UNDP resident representative and head of the UN Office of the Coordinator for humanitarian affairs in

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Afghanistan. In June 1998 the governor of Kandahar allegedly threw a teapot at the UN regional coordinator.³⁹ Workers of international NGOs were expelled, while non-Muslim international staff received security threats from ultra-religious fundamentalist groups. Two local United Nations workers were abducted in Jalalabad and were later found murdered in July 1998.⁴⁰ Locally recruited staff members were imprisoned without charges in Kabul. The joint consultative mechanism set up under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding (signed in May 1998) to sort out problems of cooperation from the Taliban authorities encountered rough weather as the atmosphere deteriorated after the US missile strikes in August that year. With the result, all international staff had to be evacuated as a safety precaution.⁴¹ In August 2000, seven workers belonging to a UN-supported demining activity were killed in an ambush in Herat.⁴² UNHCR office in Kabul and the UN Project Services office in Farah, besides the premises of UNDP and WFP were attacked and its property destroyed in November 1999.⁴³ Again, humanitarian work became an easy target of the angry, violent protests against the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council in 1999 and 2000. UN withdrew all international staff from Kandahar and ceased aid work in the south of the country in view of Taliban armed men forcibly entering UN offices, intimidate staff and damage property in March 2000, in spite of assurances that such incursions would not recur.⁴⁴ The dismal chronicle of incidents continued till August 2001 when 24 humanitarian workers (including eight foreign) were arrested for allegedly luring Afghans to convert to Christianity. Their release was secured only after the collapse of the Taliban regime in November 2001.

2. Denunciation of Human Rights Violations

An important feature of the Talibanization of Afghanistan related to the systematic violation of human rights.⁴⁵ As the UN special rapporteur for human rights in Afghanistan (Kamal Hossain) told the UN Human Rights Commission once, the people of Afghanistan were becoming “virtual hostages” in their own land.⁴⁶ The “gender and ethnic origin have become important determining factors regarding the degree of

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enjoyment of human rights in certain parts of the country.”⁴⁷ The civil war assumed the ethnic overtones - a contest involving the Taliban dominated by the Pasthuns from southeastern parts on one side and the non-Pasthun ethnic groups of the Tajiks, Uzbeks and others in the northern and western parts on the other side. The Taliban fighters burned to ground in October 1996 some 120 houses belonging to the Tajik ethnic group in Sar Chesma village north of Kabul. Days after take over of Mazar-e-Sharif by the Taliban in August 1998 approximately 5000 to 8000 Hazaras (belonging to the Shia sect) were executed summarily in their homes or in the streets. Bodies of captured soldiers were stuffed in metal containers, which only caused death from suffocation.⁴⁸

The Taliban authorities specially targeted women in pursuit of their understanding of Islamic teachings. Their decrees prohibited women from going to work and receiving education. Outside their homes, they were required to wear veils covering from head to toe, including the face, and were to be accompanied by a legally recognized close male relative. These restrictions were painted as measures necessary for the safety and dignity of women. Enforcement of these repressive measures became the responsibility of the newly established Ministry for Enforcement of Virtue and Suppression of Vice, an entity described as the most “misogynist” in the world.⁴⁹

The perverse forms in which the Taliban perceived the status of women in the Afghan society had a telling effect on the socio-economic conditions of women, who constituted half of the country’s population. For example, prohibition of employment of women had robbed off the source of livelihood for the women who accounted for nearly 70 per cent of all teachers, 50 per cent among civil servants and 40 per cent of doctors. It was estimated that there were in Kabul some 45,000 war widows who could not support their dependents without working.⁵⁰ The gender dimension of human rights situation posed a major dilemma and challenge to the activities of the UN bodies. Let us take, for instance, the case of the WFP. According to its Executive Director, Catherine Bertini, among UN agencies working in Afghanistan, WFP had the highest number of female workers – four international and nineteen local. More than half of

the food and rehabilitation programmes associated women employees with their management. The gender laws curtailed the WFP's project activities too. A bakery in Kabul operated by war widows was forced to shut down leaving 15,000 beneficiaries without bread.⁵¹ In a related development, UNICEF suspended its education projects in protest against restriction on girls receiving education.

Side by side men were ordered to grow beard while music and kite flying were banned. To ensure strict compliance, a regressive, medieval system of trials and punishments was put in place to conduct summary trials and inflict amputation of the guilty. These and other measures constituted a clear affront to the numerous human rights conventions to which Afghanistan became a party already. [Afghanistan is a party to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and of course the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) which it signed.] When reminded about the sanctity of Taliban's obligations under these conventions, the Taliban Attorney General asserted that "a convention, treaty or ... even ... the Charter of the United Nations could not take precedence over *Shariat*."⁵² It was further emphasized that "the core of our action and our policy is the law of God, as contained in the Koran. We do not follow individuals, or people or other countries. We follow the law of God. We adhere strictly to what the Koran is telling us. Therefore, we invite all people in the world to follow the Koran. Any laws that negate the Koran or the law of God, we don't accept that."

While strongly denouncing the gross violation of human rights of minorities, women and girl children, the General Assembly regularly called upon the Taliban to fully respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all, regardless of gender, ethnicity or religion.⁵³

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UN emphasized the need for a coherent system of administration of justice that would be in accord with international human rights norms. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights appealed in September 1996 to the Taliban to ensure basic rights of all Afghans, particularly the civilian population, women and children, in keeping with international human rights standards.⁵⁴ The Commission on Human Rights under the Economic and Social Council appointed a Special Rapporteur to monitor and report on human rights violations in Afghanistan. The Taliban denied any role in human rights abuses and in turn accused their opponents of committing the atrocities.⁵⁵ The Taliban took exception to what they considered to be a one-sided accusation for the alleged human rights violations, citing a singular lack of mention in the Special Rapporteur's report of the atrocities said to have been committed against the Taliban.⁵⁶ Following the discovery of mass graves of the Taliban soldiers in northern Afghanistan in November 1997, the Special Rapporteur visited a number of those sites and recommended a full investigation. Regrettably, however, the High Commissioner's plans to undertake the investigations did not materialize owing to the worsening of the security conditions and consequent withdrawal of all United Nations international staff in the autumn of 1998.⁵⁷

The unapologetic stance of the Taliban on human rights front presented a serious dilemma to the UN. It is used generally to deal with regimes that disclaim any record of systematic and gross violations of human rights, but not those like Taliban, which showed open contempt towards the international norms. The end to the oppressive regime of the Taliban in November 2001 as a direct fall-out of the US military offensive, seemed to have contributed to a movement towards the restoration of human rights of women, minorities and other segments of the post-Taliban Afghan society, without any discrimination.

3. Punitive Action Against Taliban Support to Terrorism

A disturbing extension of the Taliban approach to human rights at home was its support to the individuals and outfits that perpetrated or sponsored terrorist acts abroad. Reports about the Taliban links with

the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 did not surprise those who knew about the regime's track record on the subject.

Governments cutting across the regional and religious barriers were gravely concerned over the Taliban's persistent espousal of the hard line Islam abroad and its not so secret support in the way like funds, arms and training to separatist groups for waging *jihad* in Chechnya, Tajikistan, Jammu and Kashmir. Diplomatic, commercial and military facilities of the Western countries, especially the United States, were also targeted. The United Nations and its member governments were increasingly concerned over the growing evidence about the suspected use of the Taliban controlled territory of Afghanistan by a former Saudi national, Osama bin Laden. For instance, investigations in the United States and elsewhere establishing that the terrorist attacks against the American targets in Dar es Salam and Nairobi followed by the attack against USS Cole in Yemen in 1998 were planned by Afghanistan-based Osama bin Laden virtually isolated the Taliban regime. The General Assembly condemned the Taliban regime for sheltering Osama bin Laden (the Taliban described him as a "guest") and allowed his use of Afghan territory for masterminding international terrorist operations.⁵⁸ The Security Council warned the Taliban in December 1998 about the likelihood of imposition of sanctions if the regime did not stop sheltering and training of terrorists and supporting terrorists.⁵⁹

The United Nations waited for nearly a year without any sign of change in the Taliban support to terrorism; instead the threat of terrorism increased. Therefore, the Security Council unanimously approved in October 1999 joint move of the Russian Federation and the United States for punitive action of symbolic nature, if the Taliban failed to hand over Osama bin Laden for trial and fully stop aiding and abating terrorism within 30 days. The Council ordered, under the mandatory provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter, denial of permission for landing, or take-off by any Taliban owned or operated or leased aircraft except those flights meant for humanitarian or religious needs like performing of Hajj. Also the Council directed freezing of the Taliban-linked funds and finances.⁶⁰ Though for record the resolution received unanimous support in the

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Council, the debates revealed a measure of unease among certain members. Malaysia, for instance, supported the sanctions move with “a heavy heart” but pleaded with the Taliban to comply with the Council request to avoid inconvenience to the ordinary, innocent Afghans. Bahrain wished that the need to immediately end the Afghan conflict too had figured as an objective of the UN sanctions. But reportedly China resisted any attempt to enlarge the scope of the resolution beyond the issue of terrorism.⁶¹ Pakistan at that time wanted the sanctions idea to be kept in abeyance arguing that the route of “engagement and not isolation” might bear fruit. It was also cautioned that sanctions could cause a feeling of injustice and victimization that might in turn strengthen extremist elements.⁶²

The stubborn refusal on the part of the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden necessitated tougher sanctions, although they might cause suffering to the Afghan people. But the grim situation made the Secretariat officials to offer resistance⁶³ to the Council’s recourse of tougher action – although the idea received support from India, yet another bitter victim of cross-border terrorism. The Council went ahead in December 2000 to further tighten the previous sanctions (the new sanctions were dubbed as the “smart sanctions”). Designed to be in force for a year, the new resolution envisaged an arms embargo covering all types of weapons, snapping of the diplomatic ties, and freezing of all funds until the Taliban authorities turned over Osama bin Laden for trial in a country where he was charge sheeted.⁶⁴ The sanctions outlined the following seven actions to be enforced by all States: (1) Prevention of “direct or indirect supply, sale and transfer of “arms and related material of all types including weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, paramilitary equipment and spare parts” to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. (2) Withdrawal of their officials, agents, advisers and military personnel present in or employed by contract in Afghanistan to advise the Taliban on military or related security matters. (3) Reduction of the number and level of the staff at Taliban diplomatic missions and posts and also restrictions on the movement of all such staff. (4) Immediate and complete closure of all Taliban offices and also the offices of the Ariana Afghan

Airlines. (5) Freezing of all financial assets of Osama bin Laden. (6) All Taliban owned/operated/leased air crafts, except those approved flights meant either for delivery of humanitarian assistance or participation in Hajj, would not be allowed to take off from, land in or over-fly territories of member states. (7) Restriction of the entry into or transit through their territory of all senior Taliban officials of the rank of Deputy Minister and above, unless the travel was in connection with humanitarian relief, performance of Hajj, or participation in the peaceful resolution of the Afghan conflict.

China and Malaysia, while abstaining in the vote in the Council, made pertinent points. No independent assessment was available on the effect of the previous set of sanctions nor were the fresh sanctions likely to insure against deepening of the humanitarian crisis.⁶⁵ On behalf of the sponsors of the move, Russia acknowledged the possibility of the Taliban expelling the UN humanitarian workers in retaliation, but maintained that the Council could not submit to such blackmail while playing its legitimate role in the preservation of peace.

As it transpired, the second set of sanctions too failed to force a change in the Taliban attitude especially in relation to the demand for ending support to international terrorism associated with Osama bin Laden. On the contrary, it might have caused strengthening of hard line elements that forced decisions like pulling back from the peace process or even pulling down the 2000 years old and world's tallest standing Buddha statue in February 2001 in Bamiyan. (No doubt the act of cultural vandalism was roundly condemned by all sections of the world community.) At the same time, the argument that "engagement not isolation" would work does not appear to be very convincing. The Taliban attitude on all fronts was as inflexible before as it was after the imposition of sanctions. Russia was right when it asserted that the Security Council could not afford to adopt a condescending approach to the Taliban, after all.

Council's desire for effective monitoring of sanctions was concretized only after 11 September 2001 developments.⁶⁶ The Secretary-General

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set up a five-member expert group on 18 September 2001 which had gone into the specific individuals and organizations associated with the Taliban and also Osama bin Laden whose bank accounts were frozen.⁶⁷ After the US investigators claimed linkages of Osama bin Laden's outfit, Al Qaida with 11 September 2001 attacks, the governments of Saudi Arabia and UAE snapped ties with the Taliban. Having unsuccessfully tried to persuade the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden to the United States for trial, Pakistan too was left with little choice but to dump its ally and join the US-led global campaign against terrorism. As part of this campaign, the Security Council unreservedly adopted a far-reaching resolution firmly requiring States to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism committed wherever and by whomever - a loud message to both Pakistan and the Taliban.⁶⁸

Besides non-military sanctions, whether, when by whom complementary military action should be taken remained no more an academic issue after the financial and military symbols of the American power were attacked in 11 September 2001 allegedly by the Al Qaeda men under Osama bin Laden's instructions. Obviously, in line with the past precedents such action was widely expected with prior authorization from the Security Council. However, the United States chose to invoke its inherent right of individual and collective self-defence to launch massive air strikes under what was dubbed as "Operation Enduring Freedom" from 7 October 2001 onwards to flush out Osama bin Laden and his network, along with the Taliban regime from Afghanistan. The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan as well as the Security Council showed good measure of understanding with the compulsions of United States. As traditional allies like the United Kingdom and Australia aided the effort, the US struck against the Taliban's air defences and command centres and then heavily bombarded the Taliban frontlines in a move to facilitate the advances of the Northern Alliance forces on ground. In an otherwise one-sided battle, the strikes brought surprisingly quick results in as much as the troops of Northern Alliance captured Mazar-e-Sharif less than four weeks on 9 November. Four days later the de-moralised Taliban forces abandoned Kabul facilitating its unchallenged occupation

by the anti-Taliban Afghan factions allied with the United States-led coalition. Although Osama bin Laden as well as the top leadership of the Taliban are at large, the purpose of cleansing Afghanistan from terrorist networks seemed to have made headway with the termination of the Taliban rule in November 2001.

4. Facilitation of Reconciliation Process

The Taliban would have found an honourable place in the political arrangement to govern Afghanistan without the ignoble defeat if it had cooperated with the peace process initiated under the auspices of the United Nations. Searching for a peaceful way out of the Afghanistan problem and help reconciliation among all warring factions during the Taliban era was a major concern of both the incumbents in the office of the Secretary-General – Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan. Both appealed regularly right from September 1996 to all parties to begin a dialogue immediately and unconditionally, so as to reach an amicable solution to all outstanding issues. In the beginning of the Taliban era, the head of UNSMA, Norbert Hall, tabled a plan for a cease-fire, the demilitarization of Kabul, and a national peace process, but to no avail.⁶⁹ Soon after assuming office in 1997, Secretary-General, Kofi Annan made resolution of the Afghanistan conflict a priority and appointed as his special envoy an experienced Algerian diplomat, Lakhdar Brahimi to energise the peace process.

The UN efforts to assist political reconciliation were undertaken, in collaboration with the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) for two ends: first to end foreign interference and secondly to promote face-to-face contact between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. As for the former goal, UN persevered at two levels – one involving those countries with influence and interest in Afghan affairs, while the other centred around a smaller group of member countries most of whom share borders with Afghanistan. A brief discussion of each of these strands would be instructive.

UN brought together 21 countries with influence and/or interest in Afghanistan – known as Group of 21⁷⁰ - six times in all at New York

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during the period 1996-2001. In the first meeting, held in November 1996, the group reaffirmed the principles outlined by the General Assembly earlier, namely respect for Afghanistan's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; the need for the Afghan parties to negotiate a political settlement that would respect the rights of all groups and individuals; and an end to foreign interference, especially the supply of arms.⁷¹ At its second meeting held in April 1997, the group supported the idea to convene an international conference on Afghanistan and also the intra-Afghan dialogue to be held outside Afghanistan under the UN auspices. A view was held in this connection that such a dialogue should extend beyond the leadership of the factions to include broadly representative Afghan communities and personalities.⁷² When the third meeting took place in October 1997, the situation in Afghanistan was growing volatile with adverse consequences on regional peace and stability. Therefore, the urgent need was underlined to press ahead with the peace process that would bring about not the dominance of any one ethnic group in the country's governance but a broad-based government that represented all political forces.⁷³ That and subsequent meetings (held in June and October 1998) held the opinion that the United Nations – in particular the UN Special Mission to Afghanistan – was best suited to play a role of a neutral and impartial mediator. The sixth and the latest meeting of the group took place in New York on 16 November 2001 in the midst of the military operations by the US-led military coalition. It supported the special envoy's efforts aimed to help formation of a broad-based post-Taliban government in Afghanistan.

Alongside, a core group of eight countries (China, Iran, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, the United States and Uzbekistan) met periodically, under UN auspices, for a frank exchange of views on the external aspects of the Afghan question. A brainchild of the special envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, the group met seven times to discuss ways to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table and to curb the flow of arms into Afghanistan. The third meeting held in September 1998 was notable for adoption of the "points of common understanding", which called for, in the main, immediate cease-fire and efforts for a political

settlement including establishment of a multi-ethnic and representative government, the release of non-combatants, and full respect for international humanitarian law and human rights of all segments of the society.⁷⁴ At a subsequent meeting of this group, hosted by Uzbekistan in July 1999, the two Afghan rival factions were present as observers. The outcome as represented in the “Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan” sounded positive. Through the Declaration, the group not only reiterated its support to a peaceful political settlement and called for the resumption of peace talks between the Taliban and the United Front, but also a public commitment was made not to provide military support to any Afghan party.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, these words remained mere sentiments and could not be translated into action by some members of the group. Flow of arms, money and other supplies into Afghanistan from outside remained unabated. United Nations officials witnessed a number of air deliveries of weapons and ammunition by unmarked aircraft to United Front bases in the north and also the presence of foreign military instructors giving training and guidance in camps of both Afghan sides.⁷⁶ UNSMA received reports of participation of large numbers of Pakistanis on the side of the Taliban. In fact, a number of captured fighters interviewed by the UNSMA officials in Bamiyan admitted to being Pakistanis but denied affiliation with the army or any arm of Pakistan government.⁷⁷ This disconcerting picture on the ground prompted the Secretary-General Kofi Annan to question the very relevance and role of the group.⁷⁸ The developments since September 2001 further exposed the futility of the group, although the group met once briefly on 12 November 2001 at the UN headquarters to welcome “the central role of the United Nations in assisting the Afghan people in developing a political alternative to the Taliban regime”.⁷⁹ In an interesting twist, Pakistan’s position with little levers of influence in post-Taliban Afghanistan was inadvertently exposed when its foreign minister could not enter the venue of the group’s meeting as the UN building was sealed following the accidental plane crash in the suburbs of New York city earlier that day.⁸⁰

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While understanding and cooperation from governments outside Afghanistan was necessary for putting a quick end to the conflict, what was critical for the success of the UN effort was the objective of securing a broad agreement among diverse and untrusting parties within the country. The UN-sponsored peace process launched since early 1997 aimed reconciliation through dialogue between the main Afghan warring factions – the Taliban and the United Front/Northern Alliance. The first round of intra-Afghan dialogue was organized by the head of the UNSMA at Islamabad in January 1997 which brought face to face for the first time the representatives of the Taliban and those of the United Front. The talks held in a frank and friendly atmosphere covered issues like the arrangements for a cease-fire including the establishment of an all-party commission to supervise cease-fire, exchange of prisoners, administration of Kabul by a neutral civilian authority, deployment of a neutral police force; and establishment of a broad-based Islamic government in Afghanistan. At the next meeting a month later, UNSMA made available a draft agreement containing arrangements for cease-fire, the administration of Kabul and the exchange of prisoners. The United Front dropped its insistence on the prior demilitarization of Kabul, but the Taliban refused to drop its insistence on the prior release of its fighters captured by the rival factions.⁸¹ The UN realized that it was at the political level that the respective positions became rigid.⁸²

While both sides agreed in principle on the need for a negotiated settlement, neither would agree to unconditional talks. Besides, each side denied receiving external military support but accused the opposite side of receiving it. The dialogue process was halted as fighting escalated in search of an elusive military victory in the northern region during September-October 1997. As the ground situation eased, the UN pursued in early 1998 the Taliban idea (agreeable to United Front too) of setting up a commission of *ulema* (or religious scholars) to settle the differences between the two sides on the basis of *Sharia*. Preparatory to the convening of the commission of *ulemas*, a steering committee met in April 1998 which reached a compromise that neither side would question the credentials of the other's nominees on the *ulema*

commission. But unfortunately, the steering committee dispersed without agreeing to meet at a later date owing mainly to the tensions caused by the Taliban blockade of the Hazarajat region.⁸³ The Taliban authorities informed afterwards that they abandoned the idea of the *ulema* commission and urged the UNSMA to find a new basis for negotiations.

Thanks to the perseverance of UNSMA, the dialogue process was revived in February-March 1999. The Taliban and the UF met in Ashkabad (Turkmenistan) under the UN auspices and reached, in principle, a framework agreement regarding shared executive, legislature and the judiciary. As usual again, mutual recriminations followed and then the Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar, announced suspension of talks until the United Front agreed to work within the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan”. Predictably the United Front leaders refused to recognize the Taliban Emirate as possessing popular or legal mandate to govern. Efforts to arrange a direct meeting between heads of the two factions - Professor Rabbani and Mullah Omar - outside Afghanistan under the auspices of UN or OIC did not fructify either.⁸⁴ An exasperated envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi gave up. Efforts by Brahimi’s successor, Vendrell, until the contacts were snapped after 11 September 2001 events too predictably proved to be futile.⁸⁵

The military strikes by the US-led coalition against Taliban targets in Afghanistan starting from October 2001 not only helped in revival of the stalled peace process but also dramatically recast the dialogue parties. The Taliban went out of reckoning after their humiliating defeat; the Northern Alliance became the dominant player. It was no longer reconciliation between the Taliban and the anti-Taliban, but among the anti-Taliban factions in the thick of post-Taliban ground reality. Brahimi agreed to resume the reconciliation process in the newly opportune moment. After intensive consultations in numerous locations and with various parties he prepared a plan – which received prompt and unanimous endorsement of the Security Council⁸⁶ - for finding a political solution. As outlined in the Brahimi plan, the UN sponsored talks were held near Bonn (Germany) among representatives of the Northern Alliance (which by now held control of Kabul and much of the country)

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and three other non-Taliban Afghan groups.⁸⁷ After nine days of hectic talks, they took “an important step towards lasting peace” by signing an agreement on an interim power-sharing arrangement on 5 December 2001, which was duly endorsed by the Council next day.⁸⁸ The Bonn agreement outlined the functions and responsibilities of the Interim Authority, to govern the country for a period of six months. An independent commission would work during this period to convene *Loya Jirgha* (Grand Assembly of tribal chiefs) which in turn would bring in place a provisional administration to administer the country for two years pending preparation of a constitution and installation of an elected government.

OUTLOOK FOR IMMEDIATE FUTURE

The policies of the Taliban both prolonged and complicated the Afghanistan problem transforming it in the process a pressing preoccupation for the world Organisation. In a spectrum of omissions and commissions relating to the continuation of the civil war, subjugation of minorities and women to abhorrent treatment, obstruction in the emergency relief work to the millions of suffering Afghans, obstinate refusal to reconcile with the ethnic diversity in a power sharing arrangement and above all converting the territory under its control as safe haven for terrorist operatives with international network, the Taliban regime became a major problem in itself, rather than easing the Afghanistan problem. In the post-cold war ethos of political correctness wedded to the values of moderation and freedom, it was inconceivable that the United Nations would be indifferent to the Taliban reign.

UN tried varied approaches with corresponding incentives and disincentives. UN nudged the Taliban and their rivals to engage in a dialogue aimed at bringing about a broad-based power sharing arrangement. The Taliban could well have been a major beneficiary of such an arrangement, but instead it simply refused to share power with rival parties. It ended up without power. On the question of support to terrorism UN provided an opportunity to the Taliban regime to be assimilated into the world community, but it refused to avail the

opportunity by complying with the UN wishes. The resultant consequence to the Taliban was a total isolation from any sort of contact with the outside world. The Taliban conceptions about human rights and the suspicion towards the humanitarian aid workers alienated the non-governmental organisations and the donor organisations. If the Taliban corrected their human rights policies, the regime might have consolidated its hold over the Afghan population gained a modicum of international acceptability. With all round alienation and isolation of the Taliban as evident in the UN deliberations and resolutions, the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 presented a do or die situation to the regime. They refused to make a rational choice, as expected by many who understood the psychology of the Afghan ruling establishment well. Perhaps inadvertently their actions pushed the United Nations to a corner of helplessness in moderating the extreme responses. The United States finally came down heavily with all its military might of precision technologies resulting in the removal of the Taliban from the seat of power in Afghanistan. True, this was achieved with no direct involvement or prior authorisation of the United Nations, partly because the United Nations was not equipped to undertake action of that nature and magnitude.

While UN could feel gratified by the removal of the Taliban from power albeit through use of force, it came face to face with a curious combination of opportunity and challenge in post-Taliban Afghanistan. The opportunities refer to the possibility of working with the newly installed interim authority in December 2001 for restoring normalcy to facilitate conformity with international human rights standards, resumption of emergency relief operations and post-conflict reconstruction work. The coming months, if not years, will be most critical to Afghanistan's stable future, and therefore for the United Nations ability to contribute to that end. That is a principal challenge to the United Nations and the international community at large, particularly in relation to establishing a secure environment in Kabul and surrounding areas. The Security Council had already authorised establishment of a United Kingdom-led "international security assistance force" for the purpose, and permitted

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the countries sending military contingents to take under the mandatory provisions of Chapter VII “all necessary measures”.⁸⁹ Media reported already about serious differences among the coalition partners (like the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany) at one level and between the coalition partners and the members of the interim government at another about the nature and extent of the force’s mandate, command and control system and related issues – which development should put the United Nations on alert. Moreover, the Taliban forces were down but not completely out. They could regroup and attempt to recapture power.

With reference to the need for rebuilding of post-conflict Afghanistan, it would be easier said than achieved. Inflicting military defeat on enemy force as a specific, short-term objective would be quite different from contributing to the reconstruction effort as a long-term commitment. Notwithstanding the caveat by envoy Brahimi that the United Nations was not seeking nation building role in Afghanistan, a role of that kind cannot be completely eschewed either. The Administrator of the UN Development Programme (the designated agency for reconstruction purpose) recently estimated that the effort would need at least \$6.5 billion – an effort comparable to reconstruction of Mozambique in the early 1990s.

To conclude on a cautious and realistic note, it may be useful to refer to what Secretary-General, Kofi Annan recently observed: “We have many hurdles ahead, and we are going to try and do our best and we expect the Afghan parties to cooperate with us.”⁹⁰

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39. This dispute erupted over a Taliban-issued decree disallowing the UN from employing foreign Muslim women staff in Afghanistan unless accompanied by an adult male member of their immediate family. *Ibid.*, pp.79-91.

40. The Security Council condemned these incidents, vide its Resolution 1193 (1998) of 28 August. Subsequently the Taliban authorities expressed regret for the incident and informed the UN that they arrested two suspects, allegedly of Pakistan nationality, in connection with the case.
41. Doc.A/52/957, 19 June 1998, paras.39-40.
42. *UN Newsletter*, Vol. 55, no.33, 12 August 2000.
43. *UN Newsletter*, vol.54, no.46, 20 November 1999.
44. *UN Newsletter*, vol.55, no.14, 1 April 2000.
45. According to UN analyses, human rights situation in Afghanistan became a concern ever since the overthrow of the Najibullah regime in 1992. The *Mujahideen* rulers under the leadership of President Burhanuddin Rabbani launched a policy of discrimination against Hazaras and women, although what the Taliban had heralded as the rule of *Sharia* was far more serious. See UN Doc.A/47/656, 17 November 1992, p.14, and for a more comprehensive discussion, J. Alexander Their, "Afghanistan: Minority Rights and Autonomy in a Multi Ethnic Failed State", *Stanford Journal of International Law*, vol.35, no.2, 1999, pp.351-388.
46. See, Sharad K. Soni, "The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 55th session, March-April 1999: A Report", *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* (New Delhi), vol.4, no.2, April-June 2000, p.47.
47. Report of the UN Special Rapporteur for Afghanistan (UN Doc.E/CN.4/1997/59, 20 February 1997), as excerpted in *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, vol.1, no.2, July-September 1997, pp.18-32.
48. Report in *UN Chronicle* (New York), vol.35, no.4, October-December 1998, p.58.
49. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the UN Special Rapporteur for Violence against Women quoted in *UN Newsletter*, vol.54, no.37, 18 September 1999.
50. *Ibid.*, p.23.
51. *UN Newsletter*, vol.51, no.42, 19 October 1996.
52. Quoted by the Special Rapporteur, *Ibid.*, p.20.
53. A/RES/52/145, 12 December 1997, A/RES/53/203[B], 18 December 1998, A/RES/54/185, 17 December 1999, and A/RES/55/174[B], 19 December 2000.
54. Secretary-General's Note on human rights situation in Afghanistan in Doc.A/51/481, 11 October 1996, para.86.
55. Doc.A/53/695, 23 November 1998, para.20.
56. See, in this connection, Ralph H. Magnus, "Afghanistan in 1997: The War Moves North", *Asian Survey* (Berkeley), vol.38, no.2, February 1998, p.115.

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57. Doc.A/53/455, 2 October 1998, paras. 42-43.
58. Reference may be made to at least two resolutions of the General Assembly: A/RES./51/195[B] of 17 December 1996 and A/RES./54/189[A] of 17 December 1999.
59. S/RES/1214(1997) of 8 December.
60. S/RES/1267 (1999) of 15 October.
61. For details see the verbatim record of the Security Council's 4051st meeting in Doc.S/PV.4051, 15 October 1999.
62. Doc.S/PV.4039, resumption 1, 27 August 1999, p.23.
63. See "Sanctions will hit Afghans hard" in *The Hindu* of 21 December 2000. The Russian representative at the Security Council reportedly complained to Deputy Secretary-General, Louise Frechette against some relief officials for opposing the sanctions.
64. S/RES/1333 (2000) of 19 December.
65. Statements of the Chinese, the Malaysian and Russian delegates, Doc.S/PV.4251, 19 December 2000.
66. S/RES/1363 (2001), 30 June.
67. Doc.S/2001/887, 18 September 2001.
68. Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001), 28 September 2001.
69. Ralph H. Magnus, "Afghanistan in 1996: Year of Taliban", *Asian Survey*, vol.37, no.2, February 1997, p.117. On the problems of peace process prior to the Taliban emergence on the scene, see Zalmoy Halilzad, "Afghanistan in 1995: Civil War and Mini Great Game", *Asian Survey*, vol.36, no.2, February 1996, p.195.
70. The Group comprised China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uzbekistan
71. Doc.A/51/698, 16 November 1996, pp.10-11.
72. Doc.A/51/929, 16 June 1997, p.5.
73. Doc.A/52/682, 14 November 1997, pp.7-8.
74. Annexed to Doc.A/53/455, 2 October 1998.
75. Doc.A/54/536, 16 November 1999, para.17.
76. Doc.A/52/957, 19 June 1998, paras.6 and 7.
77. Doc.A/53/455, 2 October 1998, para.7.
78. Quoted in *UN Newsletter*, vol.54, no.39, 2 October 1999.
79. For statement of foreign ministers of this group, see Annex to UN Doc. A/56/681, 6 December 2001.

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80. *UN Newsletter*, vol.56, no.46, 17-23 November 2001.
81. Magnus, n.56, pp.109-115. See also P. Stobdan, "The Afghan Conflict and Regional Security", *Strategic Analysis* (New Delhi), vol.23, no.5, August 1999, pp.719-747.
82. Details in Doc.A/51/838, 16 March 1997, pp.4-5 and A/52/682, 14 November 1997, p.5.
83. Doc.A/52/957, 19 June 1998, pp.3-4.
84. Doc. A/54/536, 16 November 1999, pp.3-4.
85. Details in Doc.A/56/681, 6 December 2001, p.4.
86. S/RES/1378 (2001), 14 November 2001.
87. Among them were those close to the ex-king, Zahir Shah exiled in Rome (known as the Rome process), a motley group of Afghan refugees and the Diaspora (identified as the Cyprus group) and the Peshawar convention of the Afghan women.
88. S/RES/1383 (2001) of 6 December.
89. S/RES/1386 (2001) of 20 December.
90. Quoted in *UN Newsletter*, vol.56, no.49, 8-14 December 2001.

Advent of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan: US Policy Examined

Apratim Mukarji

Delivering his first State of the Union address to the United States Congress on January 29, 2002, President George W. Bush remarked, “Our discoveries in Afghanistan confirmed our worst fears, and showed us the true scope of the task ahead. We have seen the depth of our enemies’ hatred in videos, where they laugh about the loss of innocent life. What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning.”

President Bush’s choice of the word “discovery” merits attention because it exposes the willful tendency of the world’s demonstrably most powerful nation to ignore and recognize reality strictly according to its perceptions *of the moment*. The intrinsic worth of fact and fiction is apparently secondary to these seemingly transitory perceptions. The American response to the civil war in Afghanistan exemplifies this behavioural pattern of the US administration, which often causes misgivings in the minds of other national governments.

Many governments including those which are constituents of the US-led global war against terrorism have since expressed their misgivings about Washington’s capacity to stay focussed on Afghanistan once the immediate objective of driving out the Taliban from power and destruction of Al-Qaida was achieved. The impression gathered at the Tokyo conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan on January 21-22, 2002, however, was that it was the United States which was not only leading the world at the moment in rebuilding Afghanistan but would also continue to do so. According to a perceptive Indian observer¹, the Tokyo conference was essentially one where the US dominated every aspect, proclaiming its leadership role in no uncertain terms. “It was the US all

over,” he said. Scepticism over the Bush administration’s capacity to stay equally interested in Afghanistan, however, persists.

Perhaps the most eloquent appeal to the international community and the United States in particular to sustain their interest in the devastated country came from the person most vitally involved in the resurrection of Afghanistan-Chairman of the interim administration Hamid Karzai. Speaking in Rome on December 19, 2001, three days before the interim government was to assume power in Kabul, Karzai said, “I think the international community cannot afford to leave Afghanistan alone the way it did. The international community saw the consequences of neglecting Afghanistan. It should be wise enough not to do it again.” Even then, however, when mediapersons enquired if Karzai could predict the duration of US interest in his country, he said that he did not know. The best that he could manage was this, “Let’s hope the situation in Afghanistan stabilizes as soon as possible, let’s hope that the Afghan people will stand on their own firm feet very soon in Afghanistan.”

In this context, while judging purely by the past behavioural pattern one might assume a gradual decline of US interest in the country with the immediate and relatively pressing objectives achieved, a perceptive comment by *The Economist* that has caught wide attention deserves to be noted. The British journal said that with the end of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, “the United States of America has become a third neighbour of Central Asia.” The other two neighbours are, of course, Russia and China.

If the swift collapse of the Taliban in the face of the US-led air onslaught came as a largely unexpected development (numerous commentators in the media including military affairs experts and representatives of various governments had continued to predict a prolonged resistance by the ruling fundamentalist militia, usually described as uncommonly fierce fighters without, of course, the Pakistan connection being mentioned), a corresponding development that caused no lesser degree of astonishment was the advent of the Northern Alliance in both the anti-terrorist operations and the post-Taliban Afghanistan.

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The dramatic and totally unexpected change of fortune for the Northern Alliance (or its formal appellation United Front) deserves comprehensive study and analysis, for this development also facilitates a fuller understanding of international politics that was being played out by major international players in a strategically sensitive region (Central and South Asia with proximity to the Russian Federation and China) in the post-September 11, 2001 period.

The dramatic contrast between Washington's misgivings and outright unhappiness over the Northern Alliance's growing clout as the war against the Taliban and Al-Qaida raged during October-December, 2001, climaxing with President George W. Bush's publicly aired warning to the Northern Alliance forces not to enter Kabul, and the overwhelming flow of eulogy by the same President during the Washington visit of the Chairman of the interim administration in Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai in late January 2002, highlights this extraordinary shift from the purely negative and even hostile international perceptions about the premier anti-Taliban fighting force to a remarkably positive and tolerant attitude today.

A typical instance of the popular US perception of the Northern Alliance as it prevailed during the air campaign and just before the Taliban abandoned Kabul was the following editorial of the *New York Times*²: "The (Northern) alliance's ground forces can be an important military asset in dislodging the Taliban. But its fractious and ethnically unrepresentative leaders must not be allowed to exploit an American-backed drive on the capital to position themselves as the nation's dominant political figures. Such a lopsided government would have little chance of gaining nationwide legitimacy or acceptance by important neighbours like Pakistan. Many of the Northern Alliance's leaders are the same people whose murderous feuding and misgovernment between 1992 and 1996 helped open the way for the Taliban takeover."

The editorial is significant and it must be reiterated that it is also representative of the majoritarian journalistic views at the time in advancing the argument that it was the misrule of the Northern Alliance

which brought the Taliban into power. Yet, nothing could be farther from the truth. It is now well established that after the *mujahideen* leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, promoted by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the Pakistan army and the Pakistan government as their proxy to be propelled into power in Kabul, was spurned by Northern Alliance commander and the then Defence Minister Ahmad Shah Massoud, Islamabad and the ISI ensured that the Northern Alliance would not be allowed a relatively peaceful and fruitful rule in Kabul. The sheer extent of daily rocket attacks by Hekmatyar's forces, its logistics fully supported by Islamabad, on Kabul was mind-boggling, which certainly ensured that the Burhanuddin Rabbani government would not be able to rule in peace. It was also the period when the world, led by the US, preferred to ignore the events in Afghanistan, thus facilitating the Taliban and Pakistani forces' uninterrupted offensive indirectly till Commander Massoud, taken by surprise by the sudden appearance of the Taliban militia, decided to retreat rather than allow Kabul to be completely destroyed by continued fighting and bloodshed. The feuding among the *mujahideen* (apart, of course, from the Afghans' native talent for incessant blood-fueled reinforced by the equally in-bred egoism), on the other hand, was facilitated to a great extent by the former communists and fellow-travellers intermingling with the Northern Alliance forces and thereby sabotaging successfully the Rabbani government's efforts to restore law and order. It was this combination of the Hekmatyar-ISI-Pakistani army factor and the former Soviet allies masquerading as the *mujahideen* which proved to be deadly for the Rabbani government and accentuated its downfall.

Not to speak of the ingrained American and Western apathy towards the Northern Alliance, the Indian media displayed in plenty a similar mindset, even though they could have acquitted themselves better by virtue of being traditionally close to the Afghans. "The sudden and unexpected breakdown of the Taliban has come as a great surprise to the world," wrote a former professor of South Asian studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Kalim Bahadur.³ "The rapid dissolution of the Taliban has pre-empted all the efforts to cobble together some

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structure for a future government in Afghanistan. Now suddenly there is a power vacuum in the country and no one has a clue how to fill it up. There are no two opinions there should be a broad-based government in Kabul which represents the diversity and the multi-ethnic character of the country. But that is easier said than done. There is every possibility that if (there are) no urgent measures, the country would drown once again in another round of bloodshed where numerous warlords, tribal and political leaders and local satraps vie for controlling small areas as their fiefdoms. This has already begun. *A government under the auspices of any one group like the Northern Alliance would not be viable and would not have the support of the other groups.*" (italics added)

Interestingly, the same issue of the newspaper carried the following statement of the Rabbani government's ambassador to New Delhi Masood Khalili, "the United Nations special envoy for Afghanistan is expected in Kabul in the next two days and the Northern Alliance is very keen that they facilitate the setting up of an interim government. The Northern Alliance is very clear that they are not going to set up such an interim arrangement. If tomorrow President Rabbani were to initiate such a process, the people would look upon him with suspicion and insist he was doing it to install himself as president. The initiative must come from the UN; we have reposed faith in them. Two processes are possible. The arrangement will either be brought about at the initiative of the former King of Afghanistan Zahir Shah or else the UN will have to set up a *loya jirga* where people will decide who their next leader is going to be. We are not against either scheme. A final government will only be set up after there have been elections. *The Northern Alliance will accept the decision either way.*"⁴ (italics added).

What Ambassador Khalili added was no less significant, for it succinctly put on record the likely pitfalls to the restoration of normalcy in Afghanistan that should be avoided at all costs. This was what he said, "Once this broad-based, multi-ethnic government is in place, the UN has to ensure that our neighbours, especially Pakistan, are not allowed to destabilize it as they have done so in the past. The US must keep a

check on our neighbours. After all, it cannot be forgotten that traditionally, problems in Afghanistan have been created for us not from insiders but from outsiders.”

True to the style adopted by commentators irrespective of their nationalities, Prof. Bahadur clearly chose to ignore the truth (which was available in plenty, because Northern Alliance spokesmen including Commander Massoud had been speaking out in the same vein on all fora) and preferred to adopt without question the Western perception about the Northern Alliance, though he was better facilitated to find out the truth than Westerners most of whom would have had problems in locating the country in question on a school atlas. Had he and others of a similar bent of mind cared, they would have found out that for years together, the Northern Alliance and, most notably, Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, had been telling the world precisely what Ambassador Khalili was pointing out on a later day.

WESTERN INDIFFERENCE

Coming back to the issue of the manner in which the Northern Alliance had to vacate Kabul in September, 1996, and asked if, on a hindsight, he would have preferred to stay put in Kabul and offer resistance to the advancing Taliban, Commander Massoud was categorical, “I am still convinced that it (the decision to withdraw) was a clever decision. The arrival of the Taliban in Kabul’s outskirts was totally unexpected; a last-minute defence would have meant to tear apart the city and to exact an unbearable toll of victims among civilians.”⁵

In a message to the people of the US, dated October 8, 1998,⁶ Commander Massoud said, “Against all odds, we, meaning the free world and Afghans, halted and checkmated Soviet expansionism a decade ago. But the embattled people of my country did not savour the fruits of victory. Instead they were thrust in a whirlwind of foreign intrigue, deception, great gamemanship and internal strife. We Afghans erred too. Our shortcomings were as a result of political innocence, inexperience, vulnerability, victimization, bickering and inflated egos. But by no means does this justify what some of our so-called Cold War allies did to

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undermine this just victory and unleash their diabolical plans to destroy and subjugate Afghanistan.” “The country has gradually been occupied by fanatics, extremists, terrorists, mercenaries, drug mafia and professional murderers. One faction, the Taliban, which by no means rightly represents Islam, Afghanistan or our centuries-old cultural heritage, has with direct foreign assistance exacerbated this explosive situation. They are unyielding and unwilling to talk or reach a compromise with any other Afghan side.” “Unfortunately, ” Commander Massoud continued, “this dark accomplishment could not have materialized without the direct support and involvement of influential governmental and non-governmental circles in Pakistan. Aside from receiving military logistics, fuel and arms from Pakistan, our intelligence reports indicate that more than 28, 000 Pakistani citizens including paramilitary personnel and military advisers are part of the Taliban occupation forces in various parts of Afghanistan. We currently hold more than 500 Pakistani citizens including military personnel in our POW camps.”

Reporting for *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, on September 9, 1997 the author wrote, “Afghanistan has proved to be the best training field for Islamic militants who are being used by Pakistan in its proxy war in the Kashmir valley. Hundreds of *madrassas* (religious seminaries) set up by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Pakistan are churning out militants programmed to fight in Afghanistan, Kashmir and Central Asia. Former Prime Minister of India, I.K.Gujral told the Rajya Sabha in a written answer on July 30 that ‘there are also credible international media reports that the Taliban have handed over some terrorist training facilities in Afghanistan to the *Harkat-ul-Ansar* for training Pakistani and other youths for terrorist activities directed against India.’ ‘After training in Afghanistan, these fighters are sent to Kashmir,’ Deputy Foreign Minister and spokesman of the Northern Alliance Dr. A. Abdullah said during his visit to Delhi recently. He also charged that *Harkat-ul-Ansar* was among the various terrorist outfits ‘created’ by the Pakistani intelligence agencies. ‘Some of these fighters have told us that they are actually headed for Bukhara and that Afghanistan is only a barrier to them, ’ he said. Seventy serving Pakistani defence personnel are at

present captives in the hands of the Northern Alliance, he said. The ultra fundamentalist Taliban, ruling two-thirds of the war-torn Afghanistan, are paying Pakistan Rs 50, 000 per fighter per month for their services. As many as 3, 000 pick-up vans and 1, 000 trucks have been pressed into service to transport these Pakistan-based *madrassa* trainee-fighters. ‘Fifty million dollars are being spent to finance some of these activities,’ Dr. Abdullah said.” The author further quoted Dr. Abdullah stating that “*The involvement of Pakistan in the situation in Afghanistan is very clear and we expected the United States to stop it from interfering but obviously it has been given a free hand (by the US).*”

The sustained indifference that the Northern Alliance or the Rabbani government experienced in their repeated efforts to get Western governments interested in the civil war in Afghanistan was premised on the assumption that any further strengthening of the anti-Taliban force would merely serve to expand the niche that the unwelcome coalition of Russia, India and Iran already enjoyed in the non-Taliban-held parts of the country. Besides, Commander Massoud was considered too independent a person to offer any probability of ever crossing over to the Western camp. Overall, the proximity between Commander Massoud-the Rabbani government and the three-country coalition appeared to have induced the West to cold-shoulder the main anti-Taliban force time and again, ignoring the consequences for Afghanistan and for the region.

On June 13, 2001, Representative Dana Rohrabacher of California⁷ revealed, while participating in a debate on a resolution in the US House of Representatives condemning the Taliban for their edict requiring the Hindus to wear a distinctive yellow identity tag, that it was not just an apathy towards the Northern Alliance because of the Russian-Indian-Iranian connection that ensured no assistance to the anti-Taliban force *but a deliberate policy to indirectly help the Taliban continue their rule*. This was what Rep.Rohrabacher said, “Unfortunately, when we are talking about American relations with Afghanistan, what we have found over the last eight years with the last administration, every time we had a chance to overthrow the Taliban, and I was involved with several organizations whose efforts were in that direction, the last administration,

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the Clinton administration, rose to the rescue at the last minute every time. That is unfortunate. During the last eight years while we gave huge relief supplies to Afghanistan, those supplies, our foreign aid, the foreign aid we have been giving to Afghanistan and those poor suffering people of Afghanistan, they needed some help; but yet, the last administration saw to it that those supplies were only distributed in Taliban-controlled areas. I can tell the members that I fought tooth and nail. I went time and again to the State Department, to try to see that those supplies were distributed in non-Taliban areas. But instead, the Clinton administration insisted that those supplies go to Taliban-controlled areas. Why is that? I believe, and I have said this before, the last administration and unfortunately the United States, thus had a covert policy of supporting the Taliban for a while, perhaps as part of some situation with Pakistan and the Saudis. I do not know. But I would hope that the United States policy has changed and that indeed our goal be the elimination of the Taliban regime and support for those Afghans who are struggling for their country and struggling to have a moderate and a decent government.”

Drawing attention to the essential ideological difference between the Taliban and the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, the Congressman said, “The Taliban had, by the way, rejected all elections as being inconsistent with Afghan tradition. There are a group of people today fighting against the Taliban whose goal and idea is to have an Afghanistan directed by the democratic process.” “Commander Massoud and many others who fought against the Russians, Abdul Haque (later in the year assassinated by the Taliban with Pakistani assistance—the author) and his family who are fighting there, fought against the Russians. Pushtun (yet another myth calculated to denigrate the Northern Alliance was the widespread impression in Western political and journalist circles that the majority Pushtun community was totally delinked from the anti-Taliban force—the author) as well as minority members were fighting against the Taliban. Our goal should be to be on the side of those people who want to replace that regime and to help those people. If we send supplies to Afghanistan, they should go to the people in need, whether they are with the Taliban or not.”

Rep. Rohrabacher provided yet another instance of the Clinton administration's policy of not only helping the Taliban but also ensuring that the Northern Alliance would not get any American assistance. He said, "There is a group called the Knightsbridge organization headed by Ed Artis and Dr. James Law that have \$ 2 million worth of humanitarian supplies ready to go now to the people of Afghanistan, but they do not have the money for the transport, and they have not been given help because it might go to some non-Taliban areas. So I would hope that we do what is right in this country, that we condemn this repression as exemplified by repression against the Hindus, but we put ourselves on the line against the Taliban and their fanaticism and support for terrorism and drug dealing. It is time the people of Afghanistan deserve a break after these last 20 years of struggling." Like everybody else, the good Congressman was also not in a position to know that day in June, 2001, that barely three months later, the very same Washington (now the Bush administration) would turn so decisively anti-Taliban that a global campaign would be launched to destroy the militia and their infamous rule in Afghanistan and, absolutely ironically, facilitate the entry of the very same Northern Alliance, the erstwhile untouchables, into Kabul six months later.

Washington's antipathy towards the Northern Alliance (United Front) was also revealed by Ms. Otilie English, the Public affairs Representative of the Islamic State of Afghanistan (the official name of the Rabbani government, disbanded since the installation of the interim administration in Kabul on December 22, 2002—the author). In an interview to *Omaid Weekly*,⁸ Ms. English said, "I then met with President Rabbani. I outlined what I was hoping to do (in Congress), gave him my reports—that I'm always giving to Dr. Abdullah (the Foreign Affairs Minister in the Rabbani government, as also in the current interim administration in the post-Taliban period—the author)—about the people I've met with and some of the problems I've run into in the (US) House International Relations and (US) Senate Foreign Relations Committees, and some of the misconceptions or lack of knowledge about the UF (United Front). For example, what I'm always discussing

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(with Congressmen and Senators) is I'm saying look at a map (of Afghanistan), the (UF) doesn't control just ten per cent of the country, they control thirty per cent of the country, and in a heartbeat they can control much more if they could only get help from the US. And they are getting none of the (humanitarian) aid even though they have fifty per cent of the population (in areas they control), and this is what's important." "One of the things I'm desperately trying to do is (to) get more humanitarian aid; trying to get NGOs (non-governmental organizations) to work out of Tajikistan as well as perhaps Uzbekistan—to use as a weigh station for humanitarian aid. Interestingly, when I go to the State Department and I mention this, their immediate reaction is well then you would have people picking at it and skimming. And so I ask them if they're saying that (interference with humanitarian aid) doesn't happen in Pakistan ? And so of course there is nothing that they can say. (The State Department's) lack of knowledge about Afghanistan, Pakistan and all the 'stans' is astonishing."

PAKISTAN'S HOLD OVER STATE DEPARTMENT

Later in the interview, Ms. English explained that the State Department was being fed by Pakistan about the situation in Afghanistan. Asked why the State Department human rights reports always equated the United Front with the Taliban in respect of treatment of POWs, she answered, "They're (the State Department) getting it (information about the United Front) from the Pakistanis. Are State Department people going inside Afghanistan ? I've asked them repeatedly. One (State Department official), I won't mention his name, said in one of our meetings, 'Oh, years ago, I was in Afghanistan and I know it well.' And I said no, no, years ago is not now. And I can tell you what I saw."

When the interviewer asked if the State Department was still looking at Afghanistan, despite the presence of Osama bin Laden, through Pakistani eyes, Ms. English replied, "Absolutely, absolutely. The overriding thing with the State Department is to go along with and follow things the way they have always done it. They are wedded to this old Cold War mentality that our big friend in the region is Pakistan, and we

have their bases to fly out of. And I kept saying to all of them that our future is not with Pakistan, it's with India. Anyone who doesn't understand this is deaf, dumb and blind. Right now there's a golden opportunity for the United States to realign itself and make new friends."

One more comment of Ms. English should be mentioned. Asked how Commander Massoud afforded to continue to be optimistic about the future, she replied, "He's optimistic about the future because he is seeing that Afghans are tired of war. That Afghans now realize they have been invaded again, and they hate the Taliban. And they hate the foreign 'guests.' They have realized that these people are not Afghans—they're Chechens, Uighurs, Punjabis and Arabs of every stripe."

The essentially partisan attitude of the West-led international community towards the Northern Alliance was also manifest in its persistent refusal to listen to Commander Massoud and the Rabbani government throughout the late 1990's and take note of the essential contents of their approaches. Throughout this period, Commander Massoud in particular was reaching out repeatedly towards the Western governments for focussing attention on his country with a view to attend to the business of ending the civil war and initiating the process for a political settlement.

In the last TV interview Commander Massoud gave before his assassination by two Arab terrorists masquerading as TV journalists on September 9, 2002,⁹ he was asked, "What do you want the international community to do to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table?" In answer, he said, "The international community can put pressure on Pakistanis through various means. Pakistan should stop intervention in Afghanistan. We do not say that Pakistan should bring the Taliban to the negotiating table, but once they (Pakistan) stop intervening in Afghanistan, the Taliban would have no other option but to talk." Asked in turn, "What should the international community do to stop Pakistan from providing that support?", Commander Massoud said, "The big countries know what they can do to stop this (intervention). They could solve Kargil in a few days. They can use the same methods and pressurize Pakistan so that

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the Afghan problem is solved.” When told that the US could be nervous about “pushing a nuclear power too far”, he said, “The pressure and means they employed in Kargil can be used in Afghanistan too.”

The reference to Kargil implies that while Commander Massoud mentioned “the big countries”, he actually had one country in mind, the US (interestingly, the implication was so obvious that the interviewer took to name the US in his next question even though Commander Massoud had never mentioned the country by name). While the Indian government continues to deny any US role in ending the Kargil conflict, it is obvious that throughout the world the impression has stuck that it was President Bill Clinton who forced Pakistan’s then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to withdraw troops from the Indian side of the Line of Control and thus paved the way for ending the conflict. The impression has been reinforced after President Clinton himself confirmed his role in bringing the conflict to an end.

Commander Massoud had spoken in the same vein in an interview to Pepe Escobar of *Asia Week*, published in its September 10, 2001, issue, “...to make the Taliban ready for negotiation—because they are not ready right now—there are two points to be considered: the resistance inside Afghanistan, and the international pressure against Pakistan. The resistance inside Afghanistan is getting stronger day by day, especially this year. And if the government of Pakistan stops interfering in the Afghan issue, I’m sure there will be no Taliban in five or six months.”

The frustration of Commander Massoud and the Rabbani government in meeting utter indifference in various world capitals after every fresh effort was undoubtedly matched by that of the United Nations which was quite audibly despairing of ever bringing succour to the devastated country until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on the US targets occurred. A typical expression of the United Nations’ feeling of helplessness was the report of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, entitled “The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, ” dated August 17, 2001, which was submitted to the 55th session of the General Assembly. The Secretary-General noted

in the report, “The international and regional aspects of the conflict should also be addressed in that overall context. The Security Council may wish to encourage all the governments concerned, in particular those of the ‘six plus two’ group, to reinvigorate their efforts to harmonize their legitimate national interests and find a common approach regarding the future of an Afghan nation and its system. Without sustained political will on the part of those governments and without their concerted efforts, the underlying causes of the Afghan conflict will not be adequately addressed.”

A major contributing factor to the prolonged civil war in Afghanistan, which needs to be re-emphasized today, was the successful manoeuvres of Pakistan to nip in the bud any effort from any quarter to facilitate a dialogue between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban and thus trigger a process for an eventual political settlement. Time and again, the Northern Alliance sought to start talking to the Taliban, but Islamabad always succeeded in aborting these efforts. Commander Massoud said at a press conference, held in Dushanbe, the Tajik capital, on April 9, 2001 (barely five months before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the US), “Despite all the existing problems, we have always been ready to sit down at the negotiating table with the Taliban. We may even accept the setting up of a provisional government jointly with the Taliban, but for a term no longer than half a year or a year.” He also repeated his government’s charge that the Taliban were but being controlled by Pakistan. “The main cause of the conflict in Afghanistan is Pakistan, its army and its secret services. Pakistan is trying to create a marionette government in Afghanistan. I have always told Pakistan’s leadership—do not hope to enslave us. We might be your friends if you changed your attitude towards Afghanistan.”

THE KUNDUZ MYSTERY

In an unmistakably significant move, Principal Secretary to the Indian Prime Minister and National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra pointed to the mystery of the US-led war in Afghanistan, the alleged air-lifting of thousands of Pakistani defence force personnel from Kunduz on the eve

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of the fall of the Taliban-held city to the advancing Northern Alliance forces. Addressing the 38th Munich Conference on Security Policy on February 2, 2002, Mr Mishra asked, “Where are the thousands of foreign fighters and advisers of the Taliban who were trapped in Kunduz in the final phase of the military campaign but found a providential escape route ?” The disappearance of the Taliban and Al-Qaida leaders and activists after the military campaign was “a matter of immediate security concern”, he said. Continuing, he said, “ Anyone who looks on the map of the region would understand why for India, this is a matter of immediate security concern. This is also why India would like to see concrete evidence of a diminution of terrorism from across its borders before it acts on military de-escalation.”

The international media, reporting on November 23, 2001, from Angi, northern Afghanistan, said that according to Northern Alliance sources, Pakistani airplanes had “once again” flown into the encircled city of Kunduz to evacuate “Pakistanis who have been fighting alongside Afghan Taliban forces trapped there.”¹⁰ The planes arrived as Northern Alliance leaders prepared to accept a partial surrender of Taliban forces in the last northern city they held. But contradictory signals continued to surround the fate of the town. “Earlier in the week, ” said one report, “Alliance officials said they had been told by a Taliban leader in Kunduz that at least three Pakistani Air Force planes had landed in recent days on similar missions. Two more planes landed Thursday night, according to the latest report. One Northern Alliance official said that a group of people had been observed today waiting for another plane to arrive at the Kunduz airport. None of the sightings could be confirmed. American officials, who have been evasive on this subject, say they do not have information on the planes. Pakistani officials today declined comment.” The report posted on *truthout.com* noted with wry humour, “The United States is indebted to Pakistan for its support of the war against terrorism, but it has said it wants any foreign fighters trapped in Kunduz captured or killed. Pakistan has made clear that it is deeply concerned about some of its agents and soldiers trapped in the town.”

Explaining the apparently curious American silence over the widely reported and speculated airlifting of trapped Pakistanis from Kunduz, Ambassador Masood Khalili of the erstwhile Islamic State of Afghanistan told the author at the time, “The Americans are silent for obvious reasons. They have no intention to further embarrass Pakistan which is already embarrassed enough. We experienced the same American concern for protecting Pakistani interests when President Bush issued the public advice to our forces not to attempt to enter Kabul. Our intelligence gathered at the time that it was more to assuage the growing Pakistani concern than out of any anxiety for the welfare of the residents of Kabul that President Bush issued that warning which we, after realizing that it was more for the benefit of Pakistan than anything else, decided to ignore and go ahead with entering the capital.”

THE LURE OF CENTRAL ASIA?

While a question mark hangs over the eventual duration of US interest in Afghanistan, world opinion is veering round to the perception that the lone super power of today is settling down for a long haul in Central Asia, gradually abandoning or at the very best maintaining a residual interest in Afghanistan. Such assumptions have been repeatedly brushed aside by various spokespersons of the Bush administration. It might, however, be worthwhile to examine the two contrary positions.

First, the theory that Washington which had been looking for long for a passage to the energy-endowed former Soviet republics in the largely Islamic but secular countries will strive hard to exploit the excellent opening it has obtained by the medium of the global war against terrorism in Afghanistan to get into and settle down for a permanent presence in the central Asian republics.

Writing in *The Guardian* in late October, 2001, George Monbiot wrote, “But Afghanistan’s strategic importance has not changed (with the dropping of US energy company Unocal’s plan to lay oil and gas pipelines after the US embassies in east Africa were bombed). In September, a few days before the attack on New York, the US energy information administration reported that ‘Afghanistan’s significance from

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an energy standpoint stems from its geographical position as a potential transit route for oil and natural gas exports from Central Asia to the Arabian Sea. This potential includes the possible construction of oil and natural gas export pipelines through Afghanistan.’ Given that the US Government is dominated by former oil refinery executives, we would be foolish to suppose that such plans no longer figure in its strategic thinking. As researcher Keith Fisher has pointed out, the possible economic outcomes of the war in Afghanistan mirror the possible economic outcomes of the war in the Balkans, where the development of the Corridor 8, an economic zone built around a pipeline carrying oil and gas from the Caspian (Sea) to Europe, is a critical allied concern. *American foreign policy is governed by the doctrine of ‘full-spectrum dominance’, which means that the US should control military, economic and political development worldwide.*” (italics added)

The basis for the formation of the theory about Washington’s “hidden agenda” lies in the unconfirmed information that the US is planning to set up a permanent military base in the region. In early January, 2002, the Russian media reported that contrary to US assurances that American troops deployed in Central Asian republics would be withdrawn after the completion of the anti-terrorism operation in Afghanistan, “the US is discussing with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan plans to set up military bases on their territory. Uzbekistan has already allowed the US to use its air force base at Khanabad, while Kyrgyzstan has opened its main civilian airport, Manas, in the capital, Bishkek, for American and French military aircraft. Barely a month ago, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin said that Moscow had accepted Washington’s assurances that it had no plans for long-time military presence in Central Asia. However, the White House spokesperson Ms. Victoria Clark (recently) dodged a question on whether the US was planning to perpetuate its stay in Central Asia. Even though Putin said that the issue was a matter for the states concerned to decide, Moscow is showing signs of concern.”

Since then, numerous intellectual exercises have been held to strengthen the perception that the opportunities suddenly opened up for exploitation in the strategically vital region are too important for the US to ignore.

A typical example of such conjectural outputs is the following, "...the Bush administration is now exploring the possibility of entering in a big way the new oil bazaar of Central Asia. Its plan is to bring oil and gas through pipelines via countries over which it could exert substantial political influence and by pass Russia and Iran. Both these countries have large proven reserves of oil and gas but are opposing the US moves in the region. However, the oil cartels are insisting that Iran, which has the second largest gas reserves in the world and has over 93 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, be included in the future set-up. Otherwise, they will have to spend billions of dollars to bring oil by an alternative route under the Caspian Sea through the Caucasus via Azerbaijan and Georgia and then across Turkey, known as the Baku-Ceyhan corridor, which links this region to Europe."¹¹

In response, the Bush administration has been painstakingly denying any plan to settle down for a long presence in Central Asia. Thus, General Tommy R. Franks, Commander-in-Chief, US Central Command, said at a press conference at the US Embassy in Tashkent on January 24, 2002, "...we have not at all made any long-term arrangements for a presence either in Uzbekistan or in any of the other states in Central Asia." Elaborating on the US-Uzbekistan agreement on the lease of the air base at Khanabad, he said, "...as a matter of fact, there is not an agreement that will permit the use of (the) Karshi-Khanabad airbase for 25 years. What we have said all along is that we do not anticipate a permanent presence in any of the countries in the region, although we have enjoyed wonderful cooperation with all the states in the region. I would anticipate that Uzbekistan as well as the other nations in the region will continue to cooperate with us. But we have not at all made any long-term arrangements for a presence either in Uzbekistan or in any of the other states in Central Asia."

Asked to comment on leaflets distributed in Kyrgyzstan inciting opposition to the deployment of US military bases in the region, the US military officer said, "With respect to the question about the leaflets or pamphlets inside Kyrgyzstan having something to do with our force positioning in the Manas airfield, the only thing that I can say is that

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yesterday I visited Bishkek. I had the opportunity to meet with President Akayev and I also had the opportunity to visit the Lower House of the Kyrgyz Parliament. And what I found was very uniform cooperation. *I walked away from those meetings with a sense that in fact our forces would be very welcome inside Kyrgyzstan.*” (italics added)

General Franks’ seemingly candid disclaimer, however, apparently failed to dispossess the minds of the correspondents of the speculation about a long-term US presence in the region and, therefore, Rear Admiral Craig Quigley, Director of Public Affairs, US Central Command, who followed the general at the press conference, faced the following question, “Could you give a little more detail about exactly what the time limit is for the bases here? We know it’s not 25 years in the instance of Khanabad, but are we talking about another two, three, four years?” The naval officer’s answer was, to say the least, thought-provoking, “There is no time limit,” he said. “There has never been a specific discussion of duration with any of the governments in the region. Everyone, I think, recognizes that the work is not yet done inside Afghanistan. Indeed, Afghanistan is only the first part of the global war on terrorism that so many nations have signed up to fight together. So, there is just no time limit on any of this stuff. But, as General Franks and others in the American military and the American government have said, there is no intention to have some string of American bases in this region. There is just no intention of that at all.”

Questions, however, persisted at the press conference over the real American intention, with the naval officer denying repeatedly that there was any plan to set up permanent or long-term bases in the region. He was even asked to explain why American soldiers were being “rotated” if the US military were not settling down for a long haul. The rotation of men and machines, the officer said, was to prevent burning out of both “so that there can be some rest, some replacement of equipment, and maintenance can be performed, and our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines can spend time together with their families. I just can’t put a finger on any particular length of time because I’d have no confidence in it. All we know for sure is that there remains much work to be done

inside Afghanistan to make sure that Afghanistan is free of terrorist elements, as free as we can make it and it will stand on its own as a viable, stable nation in Central Asia. But I just can't put a time frame on it, I'm sorry."

Despite the answers at length provided by the various spokespersons of the US military and government, it is obvious that the questions over US intentions, real or otherwise, in Afghanistan and Central Asia remain largely unanswered. As Rear Admiral Quigley reiterated several times at the press conference, it is not possible to put a time frame to the US presence either in Afghanistan or in Central Asia for the reason that "there remains much work to be done." It is this clear sense of uncertainty and indetermination about US intentions that is bound to fuel speculation at least for the time being, especially in the context of the strategic assets and location of Central Asia.

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Strategic Significance of Afghanistan after the Cold War

Umashankar

Afghanistan, a politically and economically underdeveloped landlocked country, is strategically located at the hub of Central Asia, South Asia and West Asia. The primitive people of virtually no resources could not be colonized primarily due to balance of power in Anglo-Russian rivalry in this region in the nineteenth century. Strategic evolution of Afghanistan since the nineteenth century has marked the character of international power politics in this region. The balance of power and strategic stability in the region resulted in the status of Afghanistan as a buffer state both during the imperial and cold war era till 1978. Whenever the buffer state status of Afghanistan was violated and the external powers, the Soviet Union (1978-89) and Pakistan (1994-2001) tried to impose their hegemony upon the country, it destabilized the regional balance of power and strategic stability. Maintenance of territorial integrity, political stability, national unity and sovereignty and neutrality/non-aligned status of Afghanistan has again proved to be crucial to strategic stability and peace and security in the region. However, its chances are remote as geopolitics of oil route and anti-terror war may again impose US hegemony under the garb of strategic consensus.

The following stages in strategic evolution of Afghanistan may be noted:

- a. Afghanistan as a buffer state in the Great Game of Anglo-Russian rivalry in the 19th century,
- b. Afghanistan as a buffer state between Soviet and US spheres of influence during 1945-78,
- c. Deep strategic stakes of the two super powers during 1979-91,
- d. Geopolitics of Oil and War against Terror: Towards Strategic Consensus under US Hegemony

STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF AFGHANISTAN

This paper examines strategic interests of the USA, Pakistan, Russia, Central Asian Republics, China and India in Afghanistan and their responses to the Afghan conundrum.

AFGHANISTAN: LOW STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOR THE USA

The United States until the second half of the 1970s did not consider Afghanistan of any significance to its security interests. Low strategic priority of Afghanistan for USA becomes evident from a secret study conducted in 1953 by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which inter alia concluded:

“Afghanistan is of little or no strategic importance to the United States. Its geographic location coupled with the realization by Afghan leaders of Soviet capabilities, presages Soviet control of the country whenever the situation so dictates. It would be desirable for Afghanistan to remain neutral because otherwise it might be overrun as an avenue to the Indian subcontinent. Such neutrality would remain a stronger possibility if there is no Western sponsored opposition to communism in Afghanistan, which opposition in itself might precipitate Soviet moves to take control of the country.”¹

USA provided little economic aid and rejected Afghanistan’s request for military assistance during the 1950s and 60s despite Afghanistan’s repeated requests. Afghanistan under Mohammad Daud made it clear that the Soviet Union was its main threat. Although Afghanistan experienced massive changes between 1973 and 1990-four coups, the intervention and withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces, the exile of one-third of its population as a result of the war, and one million deaths-U.S. policy toward Afghanistan throughout this period actually remained the same: to prevent “excessive” Soviet influence. Specifically, this meant denying the Soviet Union a foothold in Afghanistan. Afghanistan by itself was of little importance to the United States. But the area around it-the Persian Gulf and the sea-lanes and ports of the Indian Ocean - was deemed critical to it. The U.S. policy toward Afghanistan consistently reflected a regional policy that sought strong and friendly ties with Iran

and Pakistan. Hence, the two factors shaping U.S. policy in Afghanistan also remained consistent: the U.S. perception of Soviet goals in Afghanistan, and the balance of power in the region. The US Administration did not bother to develop an Afghan policy. It figured only in the context of preventing Afghanistan to be drawn into the Soviet orbit. Maintenance of its neutral/nonaligned /buffer status suited most to US strategic interests in the region. The balance of power in the region was tilted in favor of the USA and the buffer status of Afghanistan remained crucial to it. Afghanistan, thus, figured primarily in the context of USA's policy towards the region.

Throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, relations between Moscow and Kabul grew stronger, as the USSR became one of Afghanistan's largest sources of foreign aid. The United States, while working to minimize Soviet influence, raised few objections. In 1962, the State Department reasoned "US fostering of active hostility toward the USSR [could] only serve to weaken Afghanistan's ability to survive." In 1976, the annual State Department Policy Review stated that Afghanistan was "a militarily and politically neutral nation, effectively dependent on the Soviet Union." Still, it concluded that the United States "is not, nor should it become, committed to, or responsible for the 'protection' of Afghanistan in any respect."² The balance of power in the region favored the United States, and no significant Soviet threat to that balance was seen emanating from Afghanistan.

Despite its strategic location, unlike Pakistan, Afghanistan did not receive much US importance till 1978. The US viewed the Soviet focus upon Afghanistan as "a part of a general effort to counter western gains in the Middle East and South Asia" and did not consider the Soviet influence over Afghanistan as a threat to its strategic interests. The US felt that the Soviet efforts in Afghanistan were defensive; hence it should not be given undue significance.³

The US already had its interests secured with Iran and Pakistan in the region. It felt that any additional efforts would only alarm the Soviet Union and result in the latter taking extreme steps. The US feared that

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any “overt western sponsored opposition” by the US in Afghanistan “might precipitate Soviet moves to take control of the country.” Hence, there was no major resistance by the US to the Soviet Union aiding Afghanistan till 1978-79.

Certain events inside and outside Afghanistan, during 1978-79, altered the US perceptions of Afghanistan and Afghan-Soviet relations, Soviet interests in the region and finally the US interests in Afghanistan. This change resulted in direct US involvement in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. Soviet-Afghan relations, which were considered by the US as bilateral and outside the Cold War calculus, were since 1979 viewed as part of Soviet cold war interests. The US wrongly believed that once the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) consolidated its rule, the Soviet Union would use Afghanistan as a launching pad to secure its objectives in the region. The US Administration decided to be “more sympathetic to those Afghans, who were determined to preserve their country’s independence.” Since April 1979, eight months before the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was supporting the anti-DRA (Democratic Republic of Afghanistan) demonstrations and monitoring military aid from Pakistan to the rebel groups in Afghanistan. The Soviet involvement in Afghanistan was viewed as a follow up to what had happened earlier in the Horn of Africa. (Ethiopia and Somalia were fighting each other with the Soviet Union and Cuba supporting Ethiopia. The US was against Soviet involvement in the Horn of Africa, but failed to check its advances.)

The toppling of the Shah regime in Iran in 1979 by the Islamic radicals directly affected the strategic interests of the US. The regime change in Iran resulted in the loss of one of the US’ frontline states in the Middle East region and damaged its economic interests, especially, its oil interests in the Persian Gulf. The US and other Western countries rely on the 12 million barrels of oil a day from the Gulf. Ensuring access to Gulf oil at reasonable prices, maintenance of a stable and productive balance of trade, and maintenance of political and military relations with the Gulf countries are primary strategic interests of United States. The loss of Iran directly affected the global economic interests of the US.

The regime change in Iran also meant losing a state, which was a part of the US containment strategy against the Soviet Union. In other words, the loss of Iran affected the balance of power in the region. The US then did not realize that Iran was not lost to the Soviet Union, but to a fundamentalist group which the Soviet Union was also wary of in Afghanistan and even in its own provinces. But the loss of Iran made the US realize that its strategic interests were at stake. With the Cold War between the two super powers having started in the Horn of Africa, the US took serious steps in Afghanistan before and after the Soviet Union sent its troops. Pakistan became the frontline state once again in the strategic framework of the US to contain the Soviet Union. The military assistance to Pakistan, which was stalled during the Ford and initial period of Carter's administration, resumed in the aftermath of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. US interests in Afghanistan continued till the Soviet troops left. The US strategic doctrine to contain Soviet expansionism in 1980s was defined in the Carter Doctrine:

“Any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America and it will be repelled by use of any means necessary including military force.”⁴

Carter Doctrine, thus, marked a fundamental shift in the US strategic interests in Afghanistan: from indifference to active involvement in its internal affairs. It demonstrated its determination to restore Afghanistan's neutrality and regional balance of power, which had been so far favourable to the USA.

After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union in 1989 (as per Geneva Accords) both the super powers continued arms supply to their respective clients, the PDPA government of Dr. Najibullah and the *mujahideen* rebels. But soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the PDPA government in 1992, the US Administration totally lost its interest in Afghanistan. It marked the end of the second Great Game. (The first Great Game in Afghanistan was played by imperial Britain and Czarist Russia in the nineteenth century)

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Throughout the 1990s Afghanistan ceased to have any worthwhile significance on the chessboard of the global balance of Power in a unipolar world. The *mujahideen* also failed to form a broad based government in Afghanistan. The absence of a legitimate power and ethnic rivalry plunged the country into a deadly civil war and making it a failed state. The consequent political and strategic vacuum, however, introduced an altogether new element of Taliban in the regional balance of Power.

TALIBAN, TERRORISM AND US OIL INTERESTS

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the Great Oil Game began. Freed from the Soviet yoke, the new independent states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan looked beyond Moscow for investors in their vast oil and gas fields. The U.S. companies rushed in, but Washington was against sending the energy resources from the landlocked states in pipelines through Iran. Since the next best route ran through Afghanistan and Pakistan, Islamabad and Washington backed the Taliban as they swept to power in 1996 apparently bringing the stability that foreign investors needed to go ahead with the deal. “The Taliban were acceptable at first, but then Osama bin Laden entered the equation,” said retired Pakistani brigadier Shaukat Qadir, referring to the Saudi-born militant who began training anti-Western guerrillas in the Afghan hills. The Taliban outraged the world by barring women from school and work and destroying the historic Buddha statues at Bamiyan. The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the United States brought global fury down on Osama bin Laden.

Initially the US was certainly supportive of the Taliban while they were scoring sweeping victories throughout Afghanistan. As has been noted by Ahmed Rashid, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and the *Daily Telegraph* (London), from 1994-96 at least the United States ‘did support the Taliban, and [the Americans] cannot deny that fact’. In an important study, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, Rashid has showed that “between 1994-96 the US supported the Taliban politically through its allies Pakistan and Saudi

Arabia, essentially because Washington viewed the Taliban as anti-Iranian, anti-Shia and pro-western... Between 1995-97, US support was driven by the UNOCAL oil/gas pipeline project.”⁵

The UNOCAL project was based on the premise that the Taliban were going to conquer Afghanistan. Various countries like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and elements within the US administration fed this premise to them. Essentially it was a premise that was very wrong, because it was based on conquest, and would therefore make it absolutely certain that not only would they not be able to build the pipeline, but also they would never be able to have that kind of security in order to build the pipeline. Once this became absolutely clear to the United States, it also became clear that the Taliban was incapable of providing the security essential to allow the pipeline to go ahead as required. Thus, in other words, by 1998 the US began to see the Taliban as a fundamental obstacle to US interests, and due to this, US policy toward the Taliban took an about-turn

The shift in US policy in Afghanistan from pro-Taliban to anti-Taliban, did not bring with it any change in the tragic condition of the Afghan people, primarily because the policy shift is once more rooted in America’s own attempt to secure its strategic and economic interests. Since the Taliban no longer played a suitably subservient role, US policy grew increasingly hostile to the faction

The brutal terrorist attack of September 11 has created the political environment in which America’s imperial aims of securing domination of Central Asia and its resources can be implemented. US efforts to secure a foothold in Central Asia initially proceeded in the form of a barely concealed conflict with the USSR through a proxy force. That force was the Islamic fundamentalists and Afghan nationalists of the *mujahideen*, whose bastard offspring is the Taliban. US imperialism shoulders a major responsibility for the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism. For many decades, Islamist movements were used by the US as an instrument in the struggle against socialist influence in the working class. The Taliban regime itself would not have existed without the massive support given

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to the *mujahideen* by the CIA because it was considered a critical element in the US campaign to destabilize the Soviet Union.

The Taliban emerged in war-ravaged Afghanistan as a type of clerical fascism. The movement reflected the despair and desperation of uprooted and declassed layers of the rural petty bourgeoisie—the sons of mullahs, petty officials, small farmers and traders—who could see no alternative to the social evils that abounded in Afghanistan other than through the imposition of a dictatorial Islamic regime. Following the dissolution of the USSR, Washington was initially prepared to turn a blind eye to the regressive social policies of the Taliban, which was backed and funded by two of its closest allies in the region—Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The central consideration was an attempt to cultivate friendly relations with the regime in order to secure the construction of an oil pipeline through Afghanistan by the US company Unocal, and thereby challenge Russia's control of the supply of Caspian oil and gas, while at the same time thwarting European efforts to bring the newly independent former Soviet republics into their orbit.

The US hopes of using the Taliban regime proved ill founded and it began to be considered as an obstacle to US ambitions in the region. The Bush administration, therefore, decided to press ahead with long-held designs on Central Asia over the vanquished Taliban and to install motley group drawn from the rival Northern Alliance and even the so-called “moderate Taliban”, i.e., those prepared to toe Washington's line. UN sponsored Bonn Agreement and transitional authority led by Hamid Karzai is expected to bring about political stability and restore the authority of the state. However, all this will depend upon the strategic convergence of concerned powers. The fragile social fabric in Afghanistan cannot bear the strategic pressures that may result from power game.

It is clear that the Afghans cannot be united easily, nor will they willingly come together on their own. Past Afghan regimes have been designed and imposed from the outside. That is likely to be the case in the next Afghan government. However, there is a consensus that the new Afghanistan government will have to include all major linguistic and

tribal groups in Afghanistan. If the key regional countries surrounding Afghanistan stick to this commitment, then it is possible that a weak, but more or less representative government can be established in Kabul.⁶

The access routes from the seaports to the gas and oil fields up north are limited. They include those through (a) China, (b) Iran, (c) Russia, (d) Turkey via the Caspian Sea and (e) Afghanistan. For obvious reasons, China is no longer an option. Nor is Iran as a myriad of political and other controversial issues haunt the Iran option. On one hand, the hardliner Ayatollahs remain unfriendly – to say the least – towards the U.S. for the latter's manipulations of past Iranian leaderships and what Iran considers a pro-Israel U.S. foreign policy. On the other hand, the U.S., under pressure from a powerful pro-Israel lobby, remains critical of Iran's support of Hizbullah activities against Israel's interests, making handshakes between the two in the near future very unlikely. Another interesting truth is Iran's support for the resistance against the Pakistani-backed Taliban militia. The fact that a major pipeline might be built through Afghanistan, and not Iran, does not go well with the Ayatollahs. Hence, Iran benefits from the on-going war inside its neighbor's borders as it results in delays and cancellation of anything bypassing it in favor of Afghanistan. Finally, until Iran's relations improve with the U.S., and a pipeline is built to Bandar Abbas in the Gulf, Iran may be supplying munitions to keep the war in Afghanistan aflame.

With regards to Russia, the last thing the West wants to see is another pipeline through Russian soil. That leaves Turkey and Afghanistan as the last two options. The construction of a pipeline through Turkey is already underway; given the length, not to mention complexity and high cost of sub-sea high-pressure Caspian pipe design, the result is simply expensive oil – an option already made available to the West thanks to the OPEC cartel. After much calculations, analyses, and recalculations, the most economic route remains through Afghanistan. However none of the possible route under consideration can avoid the zone of ethnic conflicts.⁷

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STRATEGIC VALUE FOR PAKISTAN

Afghanistan is one of the most important defining issues for Pakistan in terms of security, domestic politics, ideology, and political identity. In fact, engagement in Afghanistan has been problematic for Pakistan for more than twenty years.

In security terms, Pakistan has always seen Afghanistan as an element of its India policy. It has sought to protect its western border in response to insecurity on its eastern border with India. To this end, Pakistan's long-standing objective in Afghanistan has been to have a Pushtun-dominated government in Kabul. The reasoning has been that such a government would be friendly to Pakistan, which also has a significant Pushtun population.

Here it is worth reiterating the main objectives of Pakistan:

- Ensure a friendly (pliant) regime in Afghanistan.
- Arising from this, ensure that the Pushtun issue is dealt with once and for all.
- Ensure a smooth trade route into the Central Asian Republics.
- Propel Pakistan onto the world stage as a leader of the Islamic world, and a moderating influence in the area.
- Ensure that the irregular/jehadi forces of Afghanistan are readily available to Pakistan in the event of a war/limited war/conflict with India.

According to Ahmed Rashid, the gas reserves in Balouchistan are dwindling fast, and are predicted to fall critically short by 2010. Therefore, Pakistan remains desperate for a fresh supply of natural gas, at favorable economic terms (read very cheap), which is not an option for any gas coming from Iran. With cost of debt consuming over 53 percent of its GDP, Pakistan simply cannot afford gas at market prices. The sea route is not an option either; Pakistan cannot afford expensive liquefaction and regassification plants necessary in order to import gas via the sea

from the Pakistan-friendly United Arab Emirates. Since the cost of each liquefaction plant or a regassification plant runs about \$1 Billion each, and the cost of an LNG tanker is approximately \$250 million, the strategic value of Cent Gas in cold cash terms is \$2.25 Billion for Pakistan. Note this figure does not include transportation fees Pakistan seeks to collect from supplying Gas to Delhi by connecting it to the terminal in Multan via a 400-mile pipeline. Hence, the options for Pakistan are few. There is, in fact, only one option, and that is gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan.⁸

Professing a pro-Pushtun policy, Pakistan appears to have ignored the interests of Afghanistan's ethnic minorities and the interests of the Central Asian Republics, which have backed their ethnic brothers in Afghanistan. In reality, other neighboring countries have also pursued ethnic biased policies. Uzbekistan backs Afghan Uzbeks, Tajikistan supports Afghan Tajiks and Iran initially backed its Shia co-religionists, the Hazaras. But none have publicly articulated an ethnically biased policy towards Afghanistan. Musharraf's comments have made no accommodation to the national security interests of these neighbors, interests that have fuelled their own interference in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's political system is very fragile, and economic pressures from decades of mounting debt combined with political and economic corruption have made the country virtually ungovernable. Pakistan's borders are not secure, and the government has only a tenuous grip on the law-and-order situation.⁹ In these circumstances the Pakistani army views itself as having genuine security interests in Afghanistan but is not prepared to concede that other countries have similar interests as well. Islamabad's recent attempts to reconcile differences between Pakistan and Iran over Afghanistan are stalled by Pakistan's non-recognition of Iran's own national interests in Afghanistan. Until all of the neighboring states accept and accommodate each other's national security interests in Afghanistan, assist in ending Afghanistan's civil war, and stop the supplies of arms and ammunition to Afghanistan, the proxy war in Afghanistan will continue to be fuelled by Afghanistan's neighbours.

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To sum up, Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan is another misadventure like its policy towards India. By a series of policy initiatives, which are not in tune with ground realities, Pakistan has lost its clout in Afghan politics. In fact, during the last one year, its position became so untenable that no faction other than the Taliban was willing to have any faith in Islamabad. Equally unfortunate for Islamabad is that to the other parties concerned with the Afghan situation like Iran, the CARs and Russia, Pakistan has become an untouchable. No one is willing to trust Islamabad's actions on the Afghan front and every action of Islamabad is looked upon as being done to favour the Taliban. Added to this is the contradiction in the Pakistani policy of recognizing the Taliban government and talking of a need for a broad-based government in Kabul. This by itself indicates how Pakistan's policy has gone wayward.

IRAN-PAK RIVALRY

The tactical mistake Pakistan made was to try to expedite the pipeline agreement between Unocal/Birmas, Turkmenistan and the Taliban for exporting Turkmenistan's natural gas via Afghanistan to Pakistan. By periodically announcing that it is the gateway to the untapped wealth of the Central Asian Republics (CARs), Pakistan conveyed the wrong signals to Iran. In fact, it is a known fact that Iran has been assiduously trying to cultivate the CARs and act as a gateway to them. Iran has already built a railway line connecting its port Bandar Abbas to the CARs. Tehran is also exploring the option of inviting the transnational corporations to build the pipeline across its territory to export the hydrocarbon reserves and natural gas from the CARs.

In such a situation, Islamabad's pronouncement that it is a gateway to the CARs through Taliban-controlled Afghanistan was perceived by others as a deliberate ploy to undermine Iran. In fact, though Pakistan made repeated announcements that an overland route in this direction is being laid, in reality no serious work has started as yet. Pakistan can in no way match Iran in other aspects also to sustain such claims. It has neither the resources nor the political stability to cultivate

the CARs as compared to Iran. In addition, as has been mentioned earlier, Pakistan lacks the much-needed political continuity as compared to Iran. Since the former Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan, Islamabad has had eight governments, four elected and four caretaker governments. Above all, terrorism and violence have reached such monstrous proportions that the government in Islamabad is clueless of how to tackle them. As though this is not sufficient, the Pakistani economy has been tottering. In other words, there is no single plus factor which can make Pakistan an ideal gateway to the CARs except geography-that too has been lost due to civil war like conditions in Afghanistan. Iran has no such hassles.

Pakistan expressed its unwillingness to participate in the Tehran Conference convened by Iran for finding a way to resolve the Afghan crisis. Seeing no end to the Afghan problem, Iran decided to hold a conference on October 27-28, 1996, of all the parties involved in the Afghan crisis directly and indirectly, to find a way out of the problem. Giving a silly reason, that India which is in no way concerned with the Afghan crisis was invited; Islamabad refused to participate in it and lost a golden opportunity to mend its fences with Iran. However, in retrospect, it appears Pakistan had two compelling reasons for this extraordinary decision. First, after the capture of Kabul, the Taliban leadership and the ISI started feeling quite certain that a military victory to capture the whole of Afghanistan was within their reach. And that it was only a matter of time. This Taliban/ISI assessment was supposed to have stemmed from the Pakistani military personnel's (who participated in the capture of Kabul) perceptions of their adversaries' strengths in Afghanistan

In these circumstances, Pakistani efforts to pursue an independent policy vis-a-vis the CARs as though it is in competition with Iran and Turkey, sounded pretty hollow. In the process, Islamabad further complicated the already complex situation in Afghanistan. It made Islamabad lose all its credibility and made Iran, Turkey and the CARs look upon Pakistan as a compulsive maverick and a spoilt sport.

CHINESE STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN AFGHANISTAN

The Western media has criticized China's reserved participation in the "global coalition" against terrorism. However, its response is no different from that of the more forthcoming members of the coalition. China interprets the situation in terms of its own national interests, as do Britain and France. Though the Western coalition partners would welcome a more effusive Chinese support, it would not alter the ground situation in Afghanistan. India's precipitous offer of blanket support to the US policy in Afghanistan is a case in point. It did little more than betray a lack of political and diplomatic sophistication in dealing with the situation.

China has major concerns regarding the current conflict in Afghanistan. The Chinese Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, mentioned these concerns in his speech at the recently concluded General Assembly session in New York. Firstly, China raised the issue of terrorism in Xinjiang as part of the global problem of terrorism. When world opinion firmly turned against political violence, China began to talk about the low intensity conflict waged by the Uighur separatist groups in Xinjiang. Earlier, the Chinese government had referred to the situation in Xinjiang as a domestic affair and did not invite or welcome attention on it. Tang Jiaxuan identified his government's efforts to curb the movement for East Turkestan as "an important aspect of the international fight against terrorism." For the first time, Beijing has released a list of the separatist groups operating in Xinjiang, alleging that they have links with the Al Qaeda.

Beijing naturally considers religious and ethnic armed groups as forces capable of threatening China's integrity. Early this year the Chinese Defence Minister let the Pakistani officials know that they would "smash" the armed infiltrator groups. However, retaining a historical perspective on the problems like armed violence, ethnic and religious extremism and separatism and drug trafficking proliferating Central Asia and the neighboring countries the Chinese have deployed wisdom in the pursuit of their strategic objectives, in the economic, military and political fields. Hopefully, they will do the same in formulating a policy towards the

Afghan government while remaining mindful of them, their own legitimate interests in Central Asia, of the Indo-Russia factor and of the Indo-US game of containing China.

CENTRAL ASIAN STATES AND RUSSIA

The five Central Asian states and Russia all strongly believe that their security interests are directly threatened by Afghanistan's civil war. As a region, the Central Asian states are threatened by drug trafficking, the narrowing of financial and security options, and the potential rise of anti-regime Islamic movements. As individual states, they face threats ranging from the migration of refugee populations to direct security threats and ongoing civil war.

These states are affected most directly by the growing drug trade and the corruption of security and other state officials. Not only Taliban's Afghanistan turned into a source of drugs and drug traders, but also as the drug trade moves through Central Asia, the Central Asians have observed the lucrative nature of drug trafficking. As a result, indigenous drug trade within Central Asia is on the rise, and there is a growing consensus among Central Asian governments that greater international involvement in drug control is needed in the region.

The civil war in Afghanistan has helped maintain Russian influence in Central Asia. Central Asian states had earlier hoped that trade routes through Afghanistan could be their lifeline to the outside world. Such hopes have proven misplaced. Another possible trade outlet, Iran, remains problematic because of its limited links to other countries and the dampening effects of U.S. sanctions on the regime in Tehran. Continued turmoil in Afghanistan increases the geographic isolation of the Central Asian states and increases their dependence on Russia. Although the Central Asian states are learning to be more independent in terms of security and want to wean themselves from Russia's security net, the Taliban's presence in Afghanistan and the threat of Taliban-inspired opposition movements in neighboring states made it difficult for them to develop the confidence to do so.

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Most Central Asian states consider the threats posed by Afghanistan to be less critical than their own internal threats. With the possible exception of Uzbekistan, they consider internal economic collapse to be the greatest threat because it creates the risk of concurrent political collapse. The Afghan crisis is still less important to them than Russia's financial crisis and their difficulties in attracting foreign investment.¹⁰

For individual states, the domestic effects of the civil war in Afghanistan vary. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan perceive a direct security threat. Afghanistan served as a home for the Tajik opposition, prolonging the civil war in Tajikistan for several years. Tajikistan now suffers from continued internal instability and an ongoing inability to put its peace agreement into effect. Any risk from outside the country could have a critical influence on the tenuous situation. Uzbekistan is concerned about the stability of the border region it shares with Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The migration of displaced Uzbeks and Tajiks may upset the historically fragile ethnic balance in the region.

Turkmenistan also faces a potentially direct security threat from the civil war but has chosen to respond to the economic threat rather than the political one. Out of concern for the need to transport goods through Afghanistan, Turkmenistan did not participate in any Central Asian efforts to isolate the Taliban, although it did not directly recognize the Taliban government. If Iran takes military action, Turkmenistan will have difficulty balancing its relations with Iran with its relations with Pakistan. Of the remaining states, Kyrgyzstan is affected most by the drug trade and the refugees coming from Tajikistan. Kazakhstan and Russia have been the least affected by the Afghan situation.

How are the Central Asian states responding to these threats? Some have become directly involved in the conflict. Uzbekistan and Russia have tried to influence the military situation in Northern Afghanistan. Both will continue to be involved in a reactive military way if they believe that it is in their national security interest. Turkmenistan served as a supplier and pass-through for military aid in 1997. These states are not likely to believe that their military actions will be decisive in determining the

outcome in Afghanistan in the near future, but they see a need to be vigilant.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's historic decision to back the U.S.-led campaign and supply arms to Moscow's one-time enemies who are now fighting the Taliban and Al Qaida has closed the book on the old Great Game. Though Central Asia is still a chessboard, with many national interests at play, but the pieces are no longer coloured only black and white and the alliances no longer exclusive. "It changes the geopolitical situation," said Clifford Beal, editor of *Jane's Defence Review* in London. "It is certainly something none of us could have anticipated some weeks ago." "There is a convergence of interests among the old players of the Great Game and the United States," said Bharat Karnad, a professor at the New Delhi based Center for Policy Research. "The game now is to ensure whoever rules Afghanistan does not become a danger to the rest of the region and the world." It is both in the United States' and Russia's interests that the source of danger to their countries and other nations - which is the Taliban regime - is removed

In general, the region is increasingly concerned about the prospect of negotiations in Afghanistan and about cutting off contamination from anti-regime influences. The experience of trying to implement a peace process in Tajikistan raises concern among regional actors that a peace process is not going to lead to any regional stability in the very near future. Because of the experience of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, the Central Asian states perceive the need to keep tighter control at home, increase centralization, bolster internal security forces, and be more vigilant in cracking down against anti-regime Islamic activists.

INDIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN AFGHANISTAN

National interests of India, its security on the western frontier and its fight against cross-border terrorism have been largely affected by instability in Afghanistan. A sovereign, independent, nonaligned/neutral and stable Afghanistan under a legitimate broad based multi-ethnic government will be a vital link in India's security on its north-western

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frontier. Preservation of the post-Shimla Agreement balance of power in South Asia is central to preservation of national security interests of India. Indo-Pak balance of power is liable to be disturbed by developments in Afghanistan.

The presence of external powers in the region has always adversely affected the balance of power equation between India and Pakistan. Hence Indian foreign policy has been to keep the extra-regional powers at a distance. India's policy and practice of non-alignment was also guided by this strategic consideration. On the other hand, Pakistan's policy has throughout remained to change the sub-continental balance of power with the support of extra-regional powers. Pakistan's strategic location, its weak economic foundations, unstable regimes and obsessive anti-India centric foreign policy have led Pakistan to look for external particularly USA's aid and assistance. Afghanistan's location at the hub of Central Asia, West Asia and South Asia has made this economically backward land strategically significant for external powers. Pakistan's Afghan policy has always aimed at using it to counter balance India's power. On the other hand, India's Afghan policy has aimed at insulating Afghanistan from Indo-Pak balance of power game. That is why policy responses of India and Pakistan have been always quite diametrically opposed to developments within Afghanistan

A broad based, secular and all ethnic representative government in Afghanistan will best serve India's strategic interests in the region. The international community must ensure that Afghanistan in no case becomes the client state of any other state. An independent, sovereign, stable and neutral/non-aligned Afghanistan is essential to regional balance of power in the region. The Soviet and Pakistani experiments of imposing a proxy government in Kabul have done enormous damage to Afghans as well as to international peace and security. Peace in Afghanistan is vital to regional and international peace and security. Great Power games played in Afghanistan in past and present have been fuelled by its political instability. The international community must learn from these experiences and use the present war of US-led coalition against Taliban to present a

broad based all ethnic government to Afghans. Unfortunately without serious international initiatives Afghans are not capable to constitute a legitimate government and rebuild the Afghan state.

As moves are afoot to establish constitutional order in Afghanistan, it is useful to examine India's interests in Afghanistan. Indian interests in Afghanistan are related to security, political, economic and other issues.

The security interests can be further divided into internal and external. The worsening internal security situation in Jammu and Kashmir has coincided with the rise of the Taliban. The existence of a client regime in Afghanistan had allowed Pakistan to move ISI run terrorists into Afghanistan, outside the range of Indian security forces. Pakistani terrorists were further reinforced by foreign elements that have taken part in the war against the Soviets. Additionally, the Taliban had provided aid and shelter to criminals like the hijackers of the Indian Airlines plane IC 814. Hence the Taliban were closely involved in insurgencies and terrorism directed against the Indian state and its people. Not surprisingly, the closure of terrorist camps across Afghanistan is top priority for India. Furthermore, the narcotics trade originating in Afghanistan is used to fund the ISI's covert operations against India and the cutting-off this source is a key Indian objective. This also reduces the drug supplies to the underworld and has ripple effects in the Indian society. The external security is impacted in an indirect manner. Pakistan was hoping to create 'strategic depth' in Taliban controlled Afghanistan. This was meant to stage their reserves in Afghanistan out of reach of Indian armed forces. In addition it was able to divert troops towards the Indian border taking advantage of a friendly regime in the West. The presence of an assertive regime, which puts Afghan interests first, would relieve the pressure on Indian borders. It would reduce the room for strategic manoeuvre available to Pakistani forces.¹¹

In addition to the security interests there are political interests. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic state. It has Sunni Pashtuns in the south and Tajiks, Uzbeks in the North, and Shia Hazaras in the centre. A composite ethnic state can exist only with representative government. If Afghanistan

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succeeds, it will be a model for the Islamic world and should be supported as a global effort. Afghanistan is the gateway to Central Asia. A radical regime in Afghanistan could export its brand of beliefs and destabilize Central Asia and the newly emergent republics of the post-Soviet era. This region is the home of the last great energy finds in the world and destabilization here would effect energy prices everywhere and impact economic growth needed for India to take its rightful place. The British drew the Durand Line, between present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan and it was in effect till the last decade when the treaty lapsed. It has not been renegotiated and could be a contentious cause between the two states. At a minimum this issue will preclude their coming together for a common cause against India.

India's economic interests are no less significant. After the destruction wrought by the Soviet takeover, the civil war for control between Taliban and the Northern Alliance and the US bombing campaign to dislodge the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden, reconstruction is major priority. India can help in this reconstruction and rebuild the infrastructure. Entire segments of the economy have to be rebuilt - communications, transport, education, health care and civil administration and military training. Even if the pipeline does not come through Afghanistan, the presence of a moderate regime in Afghanistan will enhance the flow of oil, which is essential for economic stability. Other interests include cultural and historic ties with the people of Afghanistan, which go back long in time. There is no need to wax romantic about these but they are not insignificant - Tandoori cuisine, Kabuliwala moneylenders immortalized in story by Tagore and Balraj Sahani in film. It is heartening that the songs that the Afghans sang after the liberation of Kabul are those from *Bollywood* – India's film industry.

Successive Indian governments have been quite aware of these interests and sought to advance them inspite of the limited scope for such moves. The main thrust was to support the central regime in order to ensure that the country does not split along factional lines. This support was misunderstood by the *mujahideen*, which mistook this to be an endorsement of the Soviet takeover and it kept India at a distance after

the Soviet withdrawal. Fortunately India has been more engaged and sensitive to the needs of the Afghan people. Its unwavering support of the country's legitimate government since 1992 has gone a long way in persuading the Northern Alliance of its sincerity.

NEED FOR RESTORATION OF INDEPENDENT STATE IN AFGHANISTAN

Military defeat of Taliban must accompany the intra-Afghan dialogue in search for a government, which is acceptable to all ethnic and tribal groups in Afghanistan and that respects the norms and laws of United Nations. What Afghanistan cries for is rebuilding of its traditional State. Restoration of a legitimate all-Afghan government will be the first step towards its state building. In the interest of peace and security international fund for reconstruction of Afghanistan should be immediately constituted. But all this will depend upon international effective guarantees of non-interference and complete ban on overt or covert intervention in internal affairs of Afghanistan. Taliban stands today totally isolated in the international community. In the present crisis there is also an opportunity that the major players in the Great Game have come to realize the necessity of a stable, independent and self-reliant Afghanistan. Strategic interests of India will be best served if Afghanistan does not become the victim of power games played on its chessboard. Instead, it follows an independent and non-aligned or neutral foreign policy or restoration of its buffer state status.

The intra-Afghan dialogue for a broad based government can succeed only if there were complete cessation of external interferences backed by Security Council enforced effective international guarantees. This may also require neutralization of Afghanistan for a certain period. Since present day Afghanistan is stateless, broken social fabric, unstable and vulnerable to external manoeuvres, its neutralization may ensure its independence and cessation of external interferences at least for the period of the transitional government or till a broad based legitimate government is established. The US hegemony dictated by its oil interests and in the garb of anti-terror War also may not provide much needed

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political stability to Afghanistan. Nothing less than restoration of its state system will provide stability to Afghans. Unless the United States and the international community gets prepared for the role of state building in Afghanistan, spectre of uncertainty will continue to haunt the Afghans and it shall remain a potentially destabilizing factor for the entire region.

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The Afghanistan Crisis: Problems and Prospects of Peace

Seminar Report

Manmath Narayan Singh

Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation (HRCF) in collaboration with Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) organized a three-day International Seminar on *The Afghanistan Crisis: Problems and Prospects of Peace* at India International Centre, New Delhi from 19-21 November 2000. Prominent scholars, strategic planners and area specialists participating in this Seminar included Prof. Marvin Weinbaum, Emeritus Professor, University of Illinois (USA), Prof. Amin Saikal of Australian National University, Dr. William Maley, University of New South Wales (Canberra), Paul Bucherer Dietschi, Director, Foundation Bibliotheca Afghanistanica (Switzerland), Dr. Frederic Grare, Director, French Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi, Yehya Maroofi, Special Envoy of IOM for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, Dr. Bakhtiar Babadjanov of Alberuni Institute, Tashkent, Prof. Leonid Bakayev, Head, Department of Politics and International Law, Abay Almaty University, Almaty, Dr. A.A. Knyazev of Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University, Bishkek, Rashid A. Karimov of Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, Moscow; Prof. M.L. Sondhi, Prof. K. Warikoo, Prof. Devendra Kaushik, Prof. B.K. Srivastava, Prof. Kalim Bahadur, Dr. Swaran Singh all from Jawaharlal Nehru University; Lt. Gen. (Rtd.) Hridaya Kaul, Maj. Gen. (Rtd.) Afsir Karim, Maj. Gen. (Rtd.) Vinod Saighal and others. The seminar was spread over an inaugural session and five technical sessions.

In the *Inaugural Session* Prof. M.L. Sondhi, former Chairman, Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, stressed that there is no aspect of life that is not affected by developments in Afghanistan – politically, militarily, strategically, culturally. He recalled the period when

Afghanistan was under king Zahir Shah and President Doud, when several schools of thought had come up in Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan. Recalling close relations between India and Afghanistan Prof. Sondhi decried the tendency to obliterate India's relationship with the Pathan people. "Afghanistan is a very important issue and it is necessary for a Conference like this to overcome certain geopolitical fatalism which seems to be overcoming the world. India today has the capacity to use soft power that includes negotiations, public diplomacy, transparency, and all kinds of intellectual resources, which the country can mobilise on Afghanistan." In the Indian hearts breed the deepest friendship for Afghanistan and its people. India has the capacity to trade with Afghanistan, to have a long term relationship with Afghanistan and to provide a unique perspective from where to plot an international course of a shared objective on the economic future of Afghanistan. India has no territorial claims on Afghanistan and it is neither going to penetrate Afghanistan nor is it going to set up competing political parties in that country. India is in a unique position today to play important role. Our message should be of confidence building, peace, reconciliation and finding creative solutions and not of appeasement. Prof. Sondhi while lauding the pioneering efforts of Himalayan Foundation in the field of Himalayan and Central Asian Studies, called for appropriate institutional mechanisms to support such endeavours.

Lt. Gen. Hridaya Kaul in his Presidential address referred to the misconceptions about the developments in Afghanistan among the world community. He elaborated on the developments in Afghanistan that took place after the 1978 coup, the moving in of Soviet troops in 1979, the American alliance at that time, the Soviet withdrawal in 1988-89 and the Geneva Conference of 1988. These, he stated were important milestones, but what is even more important is the perceptions and misperceptions of all these events and the actions that these people took which led to what we find in Afghanistan now. "It is our duty to persuade and to build up public opinion in our country and the whole world, to force governments to take action which are in the interests of Afghanistan and in the interest of a national democratic government in Afghanistan and in the interest of peace in the region and the world," he added.

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Afghanistan is really a hinge of Asia. It is on the crossroads of West, South and Central Asia. So whatever happens in Afghanistan and the developments that take place in the next few years will affect all these countries and the world at large.

A set of 10 volumes on AFGHANISTAN and the AFGHANS, published by Bhavana Books & Prints, New Delhi was formally released on this occasion by Mr. Masood Khalili, the Ambassador of Afghanistan in India. Besides, a Video Film **Afghanistan-2000: A Bleak Existence**, prepared by Ms. Vida Zaher Khadem, the young Afghan film-maker who was the first Afghan girl to enter Afghanistan in November 1999, was screened. The film depicted the problems of the Afghans and of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. It was distressing to see through this film that the Afghans living in Pakistan sold opium and became mercenaries due to lack of job opportunities. The plight of girls is even more horrible, facing gender discrimination on the one hand and getting sacked into prostitution due to lack of employment and educational avenues.



View of Seminar Deliberations.

From left to right Lt. Gen. (Rtd.) Hridaya Kaul, Prof. K. Warikoo, Maj. Gen. (Rtd.) Afsir Karim, Prof. Amin Saikal, Ambassador Masood Khalili of Afghanistan in New Delhi and Ms. Arpita Basu Roy

SESSION I

The first session which discussed the historico-cultural heritage, ethnic and the energy factors in Afghanistan was chaired by **Maj. Gen. (Rtd.) Afsir Karim**.

Prof. Lokesh Chandra in his paper *Cultural Heritage of Afghanistan* traced common historico-cultural links between India and Afghanistan, on the basis of archeological, linguistic and historical evidences. He described how Afghanistan is dominated by place-names derived from Sanskrit. The Pakhtuns appear four times in the *Rigveda*. The Mohmands are the Madhumant people in the great grammar of Panini. He mentions the country Madhumant in the region of Gandhara. The *Mahabharata* also mentions them as a people of the northwest. A number of tribes of Afghanistan are mentioned by Panini. Patanjali in his great commentary on Panini's grammar refers to Naisa janapada which is Nishapur to the west of Afghanistan and today within the frontiers of Iran. The *Mahabharata* also refers to the tribes of Afghanistan. Gandhari the queen of Dhritarastra came from this region. The Kushan empire attained its height under Kujula Kadphises in the first century AD, and under Kaniska whose summer capital was at Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan. A Bactrian inscription of Kaniska was discovered at a site in the Afghan province of Baghlan on a hill known as Kafir's Castle in the region of Rabatak. The Kushan kings are always termed Kabulshah in the Sassanian inscriptions. Marble statues have come to light from Tagao and Gardez, which must have been cult images in a Saiva temple, when large parts of Afghanistan were under the rule of Hindu Shahis. A relief of Durga slaying Mahisasura has also been found, and another relief of the same is in the National Museum of Oriental Art in Rome. In the 1940s and 1950s the Afghans prided on being Aryans, their country Ariana was a land of Aryans, and they had an Aryan language. The students of the Kabul University published a monthly journal *Aryana*.

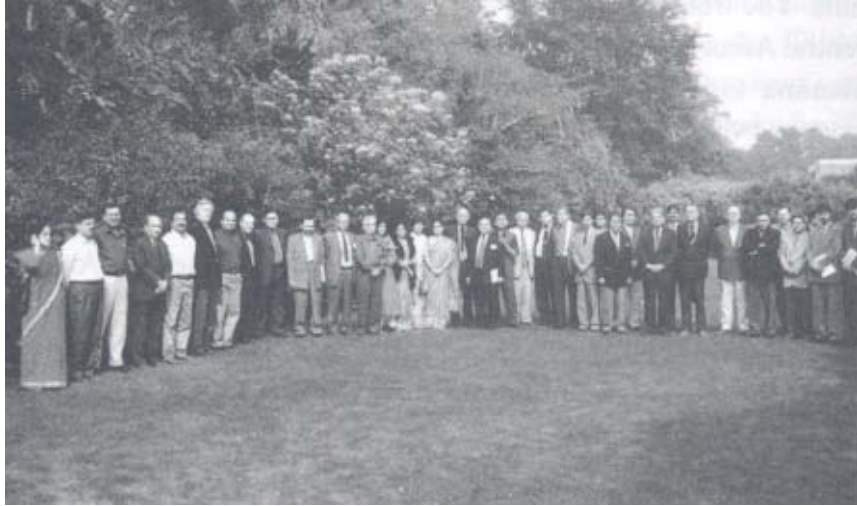
Paul Bucherer Dietschi, Director, Foundation Bibliotheca Afghanistanica in Switzerland while underlining the importance of *Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage* said that after two decades of war, the cultural heritage and traditions of people would form the basis for

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the national reconstruction of Afghanistan. The country's past is important to form an important link between Asia and Europe in pre-Islamic times. Showing his video film, Paul Dietschi stated that Afghanistan was at the crossroads of different cultures and has acted as a melting pot. Upto the introduction of Islam the area of present day Afghanistan remained a centre of Buddhism and as such Buddhist archeological sites and artifacts formed the most parts of pre-Islamic cultural heritage. Referring to the damages being done to the heritage sites, Paul said that when Taliban took over Bamiyan one of the field commanders fired many shots from his tanks on the giant Buddha. Another placed some explosives behind the head and blew it up. It damaged the right arm of the 35 metre statue. He said it was an act of barbarism to destroy the cultural heritage. Paul stressed that it was time to take some corrective actions and to protect the cultural heritage of the country.

Arpita Basu Roy of Maulana Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata, while discussing the *Ethnic Factor in the Afghan Conflict* felt that ethnic categories and systems are part of the regional culture which may not be easy to be defined by outside analysts. It is a phenomenon of social boundaries - not only identified from within but also in relation to other groups. However, language, religion, and descent have been used to define major ethnic groups in Afghanistan by observers as well as by the state itself. The units of political and military action in Afghanistan today are ethno-regional coalitions organised around elites that cohere around territorial units and access to external resources for patronage. The Taliban, supported by Pakistan, are composed of the Pashtuns. Generally supported in its policy by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, Pakistan has viewed its role in Afghanistan as a tactic to gain strategic depth vis-a-vis India. Pakistan hoped that Afghanistan would provide a secure border to the west and the north. Hence successive governments which came to power in Pakistan kept supporting the Islamic rather than the nationalist forces. Saudi Arabia has continued to fund Pakistan's policy in Afghanistan through both official and unofficial channels. Probably support to the Taliban also fits in with their rivalry with Iran and long term support to Pakistan. Spill over effects of the Afghan civil war which includes threats of terrorism, drug production

and trafficking and the spread of fanaticism and extremism have a destabilising effect on the entire region.



*Group photograph of the Seminar Participants in
India International Centre lawns.*

Dr. Frederic Grare Director, French Centre de Sciences Humaines, Delhi speaking on *Afghanistan and the Quest for Central Asia Resources* said that following the American bombing of the *mujahideen* camps in Afghanistan, Unocal an oil and gas company, was forced to withdraw from operating in the region. He said energy question required broad strategic considerations, which would lead to some regional alignments where capital could be developed in a more secure environment and many other corporations could be invited to invest in. One project that has attracted international attention and criticism was the one that seeks to link together gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Multan in Pakistan and later to India. Common perceptions are that a commonality of culture and religious ties would create a similarity of interests. Of course, it is definitely an advantage for Pakistan and a disadvantage for India. Second CIS pipeline project emerged in early 1998 on 24th January 1998, when a press release of Australian BHP company and National Iranian Gas Company announced that 15 billion cubic feet of gas from the giant deposit had been allotted for consumption in Pakistan and the two companies sought to construct 2,500 km pipeline

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from Iran to Pakistan, with a perspective that when relations between Pakistan and India would normalize the pipeline would be connected to India. The Iranians sought to curtail Pakistan's involvement with the Central Asian States. Grare concluded by stating that India was facing a dilemma today, a dilemma between strategic considerations and economic viability and it has for the time being chosen the strategic one and in the times to come it has to keep its economic interests in mind as well.

Dr. Swaran Singh of Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi discussed *China's Afghan Policy*. He said that in the post cold-war period Islamic fundamentalism has become very visible and that Afghanistan represents it in the crudest form. If any two countries are very much affected by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the region they are Russia and China. The Chinese have tried to look at the affairs in Afghanistan and deal with the problem. China's majority Muslim population live in the Xinjiang region. In the 1990s due to collapse of Soviet Union and the emergence of Central Asian Republics new equations emerged in the region. Afghanistan became a prominent country due to its geostrategic location. Russia and the USA wanted to deal with Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics which the Chinese did not like. So the Chinese policy too changed to counter the influence of these two powers in the region. The Chinese authorities feared that U.S and Russian presence in the region would diminish the Chinese influence and that both U.S and Russia could use their Afghan factions to foment trouble in Xinjiang region by permitting them to resort to religious and cultural ties. This new scenario changed the Chinese approach vis-à-vis the Afghan authorities. The Chinese have, however, tried to deal with Taliban directly. At formal level of international meetings, the Chinese have always supported sanctions against the Taliban and have advocated the formation of a conciliatory government in Afghanistan. At legal level they advocate that President Rabbani should represent the country in the UN. Also when it comes to dealing with the Taliban, the Chinese have maintained silence, but they also try to engage the Taliban. Chinese have sent military delegations to the Taliban and have assured of supplying arms to the Taliban. The reason is that the Chinese do not want to be left behind if

the big powers recognize the Taliban. The Chinese have sought to deal with the Taliban through Pakistan but the latter have not delivered as per the Chinese wishes. A kind of freeze has developed between China and Pakistan. A Chinese delegation had refused to meet the Taliban representatives in Islamabad but at the same time the Chinese have some covert relations with the Taliban so that they do not fall behind when the Taliban regime is recognized by the world community and the big powers. So the Chinese are cautious in pursuing their Afghan policy.

SESSION II

K. Raghunath, former Foreign Secretary chaired the second session. He drew attention to the problems of landmines, Kalashnikov rifles and its effect that need to be taken into account. The impact of refugee movement and displacement of population must be looked into carefully. Commenting on Islamic movement he said that the perverted, distorted version of Islam must be taken into account and how various governments of the region have sought to deal with it. Islam he said has various sub-streams. It was important to know who are trying to subvert the normal way of life of the people by radicalising Islam and how people have responded to such challenges. Emphasising on the Taliban he said it was important to study their brand of Islam and their desire to export it to the neighbouring countries and to find out ways and means to check it effectively. On the question of the Islamic Caliphate, Raghunath said that there are people who desire to bring back the Caliphate specially after it was abolished following the first world war. He said that the Central Asian Republics feel that its aggressive neighbour is pushing an agenda that is highly motivated with a view of furthering its own interests.

Dr. Ajay Darshan Behera of Institute for Defence and Strategic Analyses in his paper *Collapsed States, Light Weapons and Regional Instability in Afghanistan* stated that ethnic and civil strife threatens stability in many regions of the world and often produces substantial losses of human life. The growing availability of light weapons is playing an increasingly important role in destabilising states and endangering civil society in large parts of the world. The portable nature of these weapons and their tremendous firepower have contributed to the intensity and

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duration of ethnic and other intra-state conflicts. The risk of explosive violence is greatest where the diffusion of arms coincides with the fragmentation of societies along ethnic, religious, tribal, caste and linguistic lines. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan did not mean the end of the battle. The ongoing power struggle was further intensified by the induction of a new Islamic militia force called Taliban, nurtured by Pakistan. Without any stated policy or programme except references to Islamisation, there is no way to make out how the Taliban is going to revive the state, civil society and the economy in the near future. At present, the only source of revenues for the Taliban are the drug trade and smuggling. The golden crescent region comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran has been a major producer of opium. Afghanistan now produces the highest opium in the world. With the formal economy almost non-existent, the Taliban will be hard pressed to seriously curb drug production and trade. All these developments have criminalised the economy of the country and are having a devastating impact on the region. Light weapons from Afghanistan and Pakistan have been infiltrating into the regions arming all kinds of terrorist and separatist groups. Mujahideen trained in Afghanistan are fanning across the region leading to an increase in violence and terrorism. The intertwining relationship of light weapons and the narcotics trade has set off a fundamentalist drive into Kashmir, Tajikistan, Chechnya, Bosnia, Xinjiang and elsewhere. If the flow of weapons and drugs can be curtailed, the Afghan warlords will see their main sources of support drying up and then may be forced to negotiate an end to war. As long as this does not happen and a viable and responsible state does not emerge in Afghanistan, the surrounding regions are going to be gripped in instability.

Masood Khalili (Ambassador of Afghanistan in India) dilating on the *Political and Military Situation in Afghanistan* said that the *mujahideen* had an Afghan formula to solve the problems of Afghanistan. He disclosed that in May 1992 when there was a press conference going on in Kabul it was disturbed 62 times by the rockets launched from the south of Kabul. He said though 'the war was won, we lost out on peace'. He said, "Hekmatyar launched the 62 rockets, which destroyed good parts of Kabul. While Iran did not get involved and the Central Asian

Republics were newly created, the strategy of Pakistan was to gain strategic depth by having a favourable regime installed at Kabul. The ISI was trying to undo the good work of the war against Soviets by playing one of our own people against us. It was because Afghanistan was abandoned by their former friends including America, especially after the cold war was over. This left Pakistan to play a decisive role and it began to interfere in Afghanistan.” “Had it stopped its interference, indeed, we would have found out mechanisms to solve our own problems by traditional ways and means,” Khalili added. Taliban controls 90% of the country and it is precisely because of its foreign connection. The Northern Alliance forces lack modern means of transportation and hence can not move efficiently from one place to another. Pakistanis from various *madrasas* are moving into Afghanistan to help the Taliban forces. Khalili pointed out that political solution is the only solution within the framework of UN and backed by the regional countries. He said cross-border terrorism, narco terrorism and fundamentalism is a threat to the regional countries. Khalili hoped that all these countries would seriously pursue a policy of peace and reconciliation and put an end to the Afghan crisis.

Yahya Maroofi, the Regional Envoy of IOM for Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan in his paper *Refugee Situation in Afghanistan* stated that at present, about 1.2 million Afghan nationals live as refugees in Pakistan. However, the total number is estimated at 2 million. In comparison with 1989, when the number of Afghan refugees exceeded 3 million, this is a strong decrease. Especially since 1992 after the fall of the Najibullah regime, the repatriation of Afghan nationals gained momentum. During the last few years the number of Afghans returning to their country has decreased. About 75% of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan originate from the Afghan Pashtun areas. The remaining 25% are mainly from Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif and Hazarajat. In Iran there are an estimated 1.4 million Afghans. In India, the estimated 16,960 Afghan refugees recognised under UNHCR mandate are either able to remain on temporary residence permits or are tolerated by the Government of India. Most of them have been associated with the communist regime of Najibullah. Many Afghans seeking asylum in Western Europe are relatively well educated and have been living for quite some time in one of the countries of first stay

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particularly in Pakistan. The alternation of different regimes/rules in Afghanistan has caused the group of Afghan nationals to be very heterogeneous; the group comprises both Afghans who claim to have been persecuted by the communists, communists who claim to have been persecuted by either the *mujahideen* or the Taliban, and *mujahideen* who claim to have been persecuted by the Taliban.

Dr. Bakhtiyar Babajanov, Head, Islamic Section, Alberuni Institute, Tashkent (Uzbekistan) talking about the *Afghanistan-Tajikistan-Uzbekistan triangle*, said that the religious situation in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is connected with that of Taliban. After the civil war in Tajikistan, President Imamali Rekhmanov started integrating the people on ethnic lines, which did not find support with the people of Tajikistan. Secondly, the official Islam does not determine the religious situation in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It is determined by the division between *Salafit* and the *Hanafit* schools. The *Salafit* term came from the idea of return to the Prophet and before Caliphs, it originated from the Arab phrase *Salafat*. This *Salafit* idea is the motive force behind the Wahabi and the non-Hanafi schools. The schism between *Salafit* and *Hanafit* schools determines the religious situation in both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. This schism started since the Soviet times when the *Salafits* had responded to the atheistic propaganda saying that *Salafit* alone can save the state from the Soviets. The *Salafit* ideas exist within the Taliban in an extreme dogmatic form. It is extreme 'purism' or old Islam. A year and a half ago when radio broadcasts from Afghanistan started in Tajik and Uzbek languages every Friday between 2 to 3 P.M., it was suited to propagate the doctrines of *Salafit* Islam. Juma Namangani too has broadcast his messages. In one of his broadcasts he considered Pakistan to be a heroic country and said that India and other countries are pressurising Pakistan. In fact Juma and Tahir consider Pakistan as the defender of the Islamic faith. Their view of *jihad* is that it is to be waged not only against the non-believers but also against the non-believers of the *Salafit* doctrine. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan look at Taliban with skepticism. The Taliban have threatened to march till Samarkand and Bukhara. The Uzbek leaders are trying not to get involved with the Afghanistan problem now. Armed religious leaders are supported by the

Taliban and it has complicated relations between Uzbekistan and the Taliban. Babajanov concluded by asking two questions- If the Taliban capture the whole of Afghanistan and succeed in stabilising the situation and receive the support of the international community, will it make any difference to their approach to *jihad*? Will they decline to make use of drug money and narco-trade?

Prof. Riyaz Punjabi of University of Kashmir said that the Caliphate of which Mullah Omar dreams, has its boundaries way beyond Afghanistan and includes South and Central Asia. He stated that the Taliban's creation predates 1994 and it had connection with groups operating in Afghanistan since long. Groups known as *Albadr* I and II started by Hekmatyar were closed by the Taliban in 1996 and handed over to the *Harkat-ul-Ansar* which changed its name to *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen*. Taliban has linkages with outfits whom it can use tactfully and strategically. Taliban has large implications for South and Central Asia. Prof. Riyaz referred to Kamal Matinuddin who believes that the *madarsa* at Anora Khatak has shaped the views of the Taliban. Quran and Sharia are not a problem, but religious fatwas certainly are. As events unfolded in Kashmir, the Caliphate was to embrace the region of Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics. Prof. Punjabi said that the real battle in the entire region is between Islam which has absorbed local influences and that which does not want to look beyond the *Salafit* doctrines. Here the Taliban has its own motives and wants to establish an Islamic Caliphate. The emphasis is on uniformity in these societies and where no Shiites and no liberals are allowed to propagate their own ideology. Islamic Caliphate is also meant to give Pakistan a strategic depth in the region, a term first used by Gen. Hamid Gul of Pakistan. In conclusion, Prof. Punjabi said that in the years to come Pakistan will use its allies to pursue its own selfish agenda and destabilize the entire region and this could hamper welfare of the entire people of the region.

Sultan Shahin in his paper *The Taliban View of Jihad and the Islamic Precepts* pointed out that Afghanistan under the Taliban appears determined to change the very character of Islam, turning it into the pre-Islamic religion of the *Jahiliya* (Arabia in the Dark Ages). The centrepiece

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of the Taliban ideology that is also called Talibanism is their concept of *Jihad*. The Taliban use the word *Jihad* exclusively as a synonym for *Qital*, fighting and killing in a war. The Taliban leader Mullah Omar and their spiritual mentors in Pakistan as well as Afghanistan, people like Osama bin Laden, Maulana Fazlur Rahman, Prof. Hafiz Mohammad Saeed and Maulana Azhar Masood, etc. claim that *Jihad*, that is *Qital*, is one of the fundamental duties of Muslims along with *Nimaz*, *Roza*, *Zakat* and *Haj*. What makes the killing of innocent people in Kashmir *Jihad* is a question we just have to face. *Jihadism* is based on the belief that all non-*Jihadists* are *kafir* and deserve to be killed. As a result, they have so far killed about half a million Muslims in Afghanistan and at least 50,000 Muslims in the Kashmir valley. They have been killing non-Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir. The main feature of the Taliban view of Islam can be summarised in one word: intolerance. They are practising and preaching Islam as an intolerant religion. This is a total negation of all that Islam stands for.

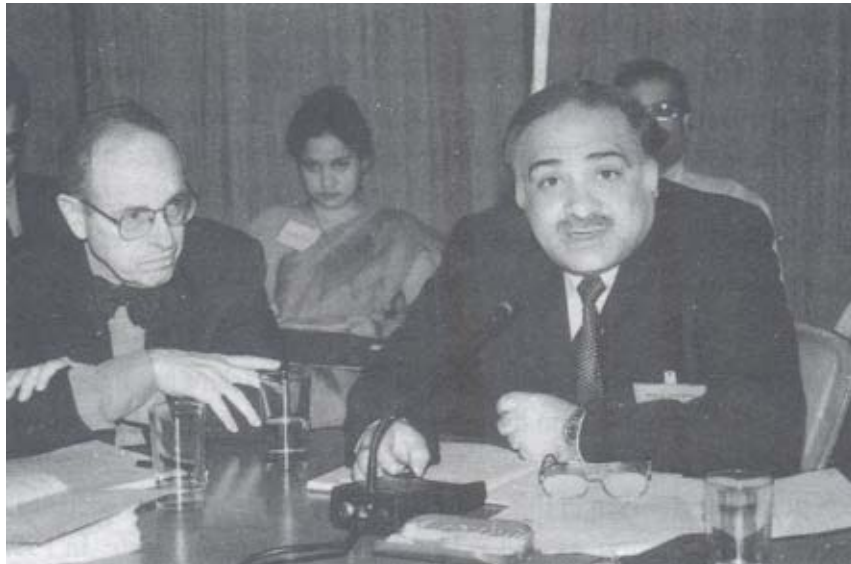
SESSION III

The third session which was chaired by **Lt. Gen. (Rtd.) Hridaya Kaul** was devoted to the discussion of the Taliban phenomenon and its regional security implications for Centra Asia.

Maj. Gen. (Rtd.) Afsir Karim wanted the Taliban to be distinguished from those who were trained to fight the Soviets in the 1980s. Many of the Taliban leaders are veterans who have survived the war with the Soviets and carried on with their victory and have almost become invisible in Afghanistan. Their military victories may have been spectacular but their military capabilities can not be judged from such kinds of engagements. Their victory has also been due to bribery, treachery and desertion by other soldiers and ethnic affiliations. The Taliban are not ready to tolerate any dissent and their brand of radical Islam is very different from the rest. Their military training and planning is provided by Pakistan and is being controlled from across the border, even though the Afghans and Pashtuns are fiercely independent people. Also, the international terrorist organisation of bin Laden which operates from Afghan soil has complicated the problem. The phenomenon known

as Talibanisation is real, for it has got connected with gun running, drug-trafficking and radical Islam. The Pakistan-Afghanistan alliance is a dangerous phenomenon which would affect everyone adversely as it only seeks to destroy. An international effort has to be made to bring about peace in the region.

Prof. Leonid Bakayev of Abay Almaty University, Kazakhstan in his paper *Taliban Phenomenon: Regional Security Implications for Central Asia* stated that in the face of the Taliban threat that hangs over the region, mutual understanding and unity of actions are vitally necessary for the states. Taliban do not hide their monstrous global plan of creation of “Greater Afghanistan”, extending up to borders with China. For the sake of authority and narcotic self interest, Taliban would not stop filling all Central Asia with blood. The Taliban are just the pervertors of Islam who shout about religion but actually kindle fanaticism and call for *jihād*. They are the real anti-Islamic forces promoting fratricide in Afghanistan and Tajikistan besides carrying out aggression against other Muslim peoples, as was witnessed during the intrusion by Basaev’s bands in Dagestan or brigands in Kyrgyzstan. Narcotics has already received mass distribution in Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.



From Left Prof. Marwin Weinbaum of USA and Prof. K. Warikoo

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Prof. Devendra Kaushik, Chairman, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata in his paper *Afghanistan Problem: The CIS Approach* said that Afghanistan has influenced developments in the neighbouring countries due to its geo-strategic locations and being a gateway to South and Central Asia. Similarly the problems in Eurasia and South Asia have influenced Afghanistan. The coming of the Taliban and their control over Kabul and over 90% of the Afghanistan territory, has created other problems. Their leader has taken the title of *Amir-ul-Momineen* and has founded the state of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Such Emirates are to be founded in all the Islamic states and ultimately a Caliphate is sought to be established. Prof. Kaushik linked this to the Communist International and said that the Taliban intends to found a Green International. The Pashtun refugees who had migrated to NWFP and Baluchistan, established many madrasas there. In the 1990s the students of madrasas began to receive paramilitary training. Many young people were used against the secular state of Uzbekistan and its leader Islam Karimov. In Uzbekistan, Karimov is scared of the menace of radical fundamentalist. However, when Taliban seized Kabul in 1996, there emerged a threat perception, which again united the Central Asian Republics. An attempt was made on Karimov's life. Then in 1998, the Troika of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Russia sought to challenge the emerging menace. However, Karimov also sought help of USA. Russia is trying to engage Taliban but they know their limitations. Many Russian scholars do not want their country to get embroiled in a second Afghan war. The Turkmens have sought to embrace the Taliban. Karimov has fluctuated between putting up a resistance to the Taliban and recognizing them de facto.

Dr. Alexander Knyazev of the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University explained that the quick and aggressive revival of Islam has become the new phenomenon for a post-Soviet space of Central Asia. And they have much in common with military forces of Taliban in Afghanistan itself. Such political situation in this country threatens the national security of countries of our region, as well as Russia, China, Iran, India etc. In 1996-2000, I regularly worked in Afghanistan and interviewed war prisoners from Taliban, who originated from various countries. These prisoners

said that *madarsas* and religious schools supply people for the Taliban. These institutions are located near Peshawar (Pakistan), the main centre being the *madarsa Hakania*, which is supervised by the well-known mullah Sami-ul-Hak. The open form of *Jihad* in its radical form exported from the territory of Afghanistan was witnessed in Central Asia during the events of the 1999 at the south of Kirghizia, which is known as The Batken events after the name of the administrative region. The entry of Islamic opposition into the state power of Tajikistan is the first stage of the political revival of Islam in the region. It is obvious that the next objective is Uzbekistan. Being the most powerful as a political and military state of the region, Uzbekistan is the main obstacle for the radical Islamic expansion into the region. The use of internal forces for overthrow of the secular power of Tashkent relieves the Taliban a problem of a direct invasion. At the same time, the destabilisation of situation in the states of Central Asia can help the Talibs to strengthen their regime in Afghanistan and check the resistance forces from spreading further.

Mahendra Ved stated that India, U.S.A. and Russia could cooperate in tackling the Afghanistan problem and the larger issue of terrorism. It is known that India has problems in Kashmir because of the infiltration of the Afghan mercenaries. Russia has problems in Chechnya, and the United States has its own concerns. So there is a tri-lateral understanding. India, Russia, and the US have to involve other actors to solve the crisis. The six-plus-two has to rise above their basic problems. Terrorism, however, is not confined to South or Central Asia. It is attacking countries like Indonesia, Philippines and China. To contain terrorism in Afghanistan the people have to be sincere in their efforts.

SESSION IV

The fourth session which was presided over by **Prof. Devendra Kaushik**, dealt with Afghanistan and outside powers, particularly USA and Russia.

Prof. Marvin Weinbaum of the University of Illinois, USA, in his paper *An International Approach to Afghanistan's Future* stated that war in Afghanistan will go on for sometime in one form or the other.

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The Taliban can not win and consolidate power nor can the opposition to Taliban win. The contending powers in Afghanistan and the claimants to power are incapable of reaching a solution, which could have been found sometime ago. With the assistance of outside powers peace may return to the region. Prof. Weinbaum acknowledged that there is a clear threat from terrorism, drug-trafficking, fundamentalism and radical ideology which threatens the regional stability and global security. The international community must have a strategic view and a package of proposals. Afghanistan should be under a kind of UN receivership. He said that he does not look at it from a legal point of view as it will have implications in terms of international law. But an investment in Afghanistan has to be made as any alternative will be much more expensive in the long term. Afghans have to stop fighting and put their acts together. What can be done is to offer the Afghans to build their roads, to reconstruct their homes, to revive their agricultural system, to create employment and to create an economy, which does not exist now. Political institutions have to be rebuilt and human capital has to be restored. A reconstructed Afghanistan will have no place for the likes of Osama bin Laden or for the cultivation of poppy. Afghanistan has to become more high profile for the international community to take responsibility.



*From Left Prof. Leonid Bakayev of Almaty,
Prof. B. Babadjanov of Tashkent and Prof. Devendra Kaushik*

Prof. Amin Saikal, Director, Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, Australian National University, Canberra in his paper on *Role of Outside Powers in Afghanistan* explained that the conditions have never been so good for a political settlement of Afghanistan as they are today provided that the United States which is largely responsible for the present turmoil and the regional actors act responsibly. The strategic contours of Afghanistan conflict are in a process of change. For nearly after a decade following the Soviet withdrawal, the United States and Russia have sought to counter the Pakistan backed Taliban and here they seem to have found a common ground. They have sought to control the Taliban and check the spread of Islamic militancy and control the spread of radical ideas. Even Iran resonates such view and so do China, India, CARs and Western European countries. These countries have grown apprehensive of the Taliban for various reasons. Hence, Pakistan faces the prospects of isolation greater than even before, given its sponsorship of the Taliban. This development has the potential to change the dynamics of Afghanistan conflict towards a viable resolution. It is time to check Pakistan and prevent it from becoming a menace both to itself and to the region. It would help the United States to generate an appropriate strategy and play a constructive role to bring about peace and security in South, Central and West Asian region. A serious move to bring about a resolution on the Afghan conflict, with support from Russia, Iran, India, Central Asia and perhaps China, is most likely to benefit not only the cause of long term stability, but also America's wider interests in the region. A failure to do so may occasion America to regret the passing of a valuable opportunity. However, the achievement of a settlement will very much depend on how responsibly and promptly the US will provide the needed leadership and to what extent the receptive regional actors will be prepared to act. The Afghans have managed with the Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns to live side by side and work out their problems. It is the outside interference that has driven the Afghans to such a despair and the United States bear a lot of responsibility. Prof. Amin Saikal emphasised that what Marvin Weinbaum claims is not what the Afghans need.

Prof. B. K. Srivastava in his paper *United States, Taliban and the Crisis in Afghanistan* pointed out that the Taliban rode on the crest

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of the rising wave of frustration and anger against the *mujahideen*. They took up arms with the promise of disarming *mujahideen* groups and restoring peace in the troubled country through the establishment of a strict Islamic regime. As the Taliban militia moved onwards, the government troops either voluntarily joined them or were bribed to do so with the money received from Saudi Arabia. The American officials were not sure how the interest of the United States would be affected by the rise of the Taliban. For two long years the United States had stood aside and did nothing to discourage two of its staunchest allies Pakistan and Saudi Arabia from supporting the Afghan mullahs for their own reasons. Saudi Arabia was interested in promoting its own brand of conservative Islam in Afghanistan and Pakistan saw in the success of the Taliban an opportunity of extending its influence over its neighbour that would have given it strategic depth and opened up the possibility of increased trade with the newly independent Central Asian Republics. Some officials in the United States felt sympathetic to the Taliban because of the latter's implacable hostility towards Iran. The United States was aware of the international terrorist activities of Osama bin Laden even before the attacks on the two American embassies in Nairobi in Kenya and Daresalam in Tanzania on August 5, 1998. Feeling threatened by international terrorism, the Clinton Administration closed nineteen of its embassies and establishments abroad. It asked the Taliban to hand over Osama or expel him from Afghanistan. While the United States reserves the right to take action including military action against Afghanistan if terrorist strikes are carried against its citizens or interests, it lends full support to the UN efforts at peace talks. Bringing bin Laden to justice has become the top most priority of the United States. There is no denying the fact that isolation has been imposed on the Taliban controlled Afghanistan at the instance of Iran, Russia and the United States. The United States' policy aims to bring about the moderation by applying pressure unilaterally and collectively through the United Nations.

Mr. Sreedhar of Institute for Defence and Strategic Analyses, in his paper *Taliban and External Powers* sought to work out the contours of Taliban's foreign policy. He contested the view that Taliban is a monolithic homogenous group and stated that there are at least eleven

identifiable groups, starting with *madrassa* students, to the criminals, the Arabs, the mercenaries etc. These are the Islamic radical groups in this part of the world. Taliban has existed since the last six years, occupied Kabul since the last four years and has done systematic ethnic cleansing and also destroyed the cultural heritage. Taliban have acquired pressure point vis-à-vis its neighbourhood and vis-à-vis the major powers. The public posturing is different, while in private the countries seem to invite the Taliban representatives for talks. Even Paris invited the Foreign Minister of Taliban for talks. Therefore, Taliban themselves have adopted a two-track policy because it has emerged during the last six years as an umbrella organisation. Track I policy, or the public posturing, is conceding whatever it is asked by the international community. Track II policy is, each of its affiliated units are allowed to pursue their own agenda.

Dr. William Maley of School of Politics, University of New South Wales, Canberra in his paper said creeping invasions occur when a middle power uses force against territorial integrity or political independence of another state but covertly denies doing such thing. Most striking example of creeping invasion is Pakistan's involvement with Taliban in Afghanistan. And when the promoter uses its surrogates, it is like holding the tiger by its tail. Creeping invasions can cause a number of problems in the world. Firstly, it can cause political septicaemia in an entire region where trust between the states diminishes to a catastrophic degree. There could be suspicion of the domestic political groups in states which neighbour the creeping invader but which might also be sympathetic to their policies. Other problems can be created by the states through its surrogates and it can have inspirational effects. Afghanistan under the Taliban is not a good precedence for happy governance for other parts of the world. One should not expect the UN to get its acts together unless there is motivational pressure from the key member states. Very often the problem of creeping invasion occurs in states that are massively disrupted. Also, the development of economic incentive has to be found to be appealing to the ordinary population and it has to be implemented appropriately so that some mechanisms for integrating the competing forces may be worked out. If the Afghan population abandons such mechanisms, the warring factions may retain some spoiling capacity. The Taliban may try

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and thwart the process that seeks to bring about political settlement, which they may not find to be congenial. Therefore, we must look at mechanisms in which they can be induced to get involved even if they do not become key actors. In that sense, the situation in which it can be brought about is by increasing the militant capacity of the Northern Alliance to the extent that neither of the parties are in a situation to gain control over the entire territory and this can work as an incentive to bring them to the negotiating table.

Rashid A. Karimov of Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, Moscow in his paper *Afghanistan Crisis, Pakistan and Russia* stated that the *mujahideen*, Taliban and leaders of the Northern Alliance, had for many years received training in Pakistan camps during the period of the civil war. The purpose of Pakistan's ruling elite and the fundamentalists since the last twenty years has been to gain a dominant role for Pakistan and to spread Islam in the region under the leadership of Sunni Pakistan. The main threat to the region is not from the Taliban but the Pakistani military junta that stimulates frictions amongst the Afghanistan ethnic groups. Pakistan has always dreamt to become a regional super power and it seeks to take under its control the countries of Central Asia. Today terrorism has become for Pakistan one of their main export goods. Afghan rulers with the help of Special Pakistani Services have provided training to about 15,000 terrorists from and over 20 countries and about 3,000 Chechnyan rebels. Besides, under the Taliban regime the production and export of drugs from the region has increased manifold. Afghanistan authorities are also responsible for granting asylum to many terrorists including bin Laden. The Uighurs are in favour of creation of an Islamic State in the Xinjiang province of China. They also seek to establish an Islamic State in the Fergana valley which is the meeting point of the Central Asian States of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Thus, from a small Islamic State they seek to gradually enlarge it. The propagators of Islamic ideas receive their training in the states of Pakistan and Afghanistan before infiltrating into the Xinjiang province. Drug money is used to subsidise the training of Uighur fundamentalists and for weapon purchasing. In Afghanistan, Taliban are using their hold to spread their radical ideas in the regions of Central Asia. Thousands of extremists

from the Central Asian Republics are being trained in special training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan to be used for infiltration of their native countries wherein they may reinforce the Islamic underground movements. The activities of these movements are co-ordinated from Kandahar and Kabul. The Wahabi centres of Mullah Omar and bin Laden back up such activities. The unstable situation in Afghanistan can have its repercussions in the regions of Central Asia, Middle East and Russia and that is why such tendencies have to be nipped in the bud. First of all the bordering countries of Afghanistan have to take a firm stand against Pakistan to stop sponsoring terrorist activities. Without the military help of Pakistan and money from Saudi Arabia and UAE, the Taliban movement will break down and the problems of extremism and drugs in the region could be easily solved. There are states that are pressurising the Islamic Conference to recognise the Taliban and this step will lead to giving legitimacy to extremism and terrorism in the region. Also, one must not forget the existence of Pakistan's nuclear bomb. Geopolitically, no western super power intends to deal with the situation in Afghanistan and although the United States has officially criticised both Pakistan and the Taliban it has not taken any concrete actions. Only the regional states are interested in solving the problem as they fear its repercussions.

Dr. Jyotsna Bakshi of Institute for Defence and Strategic Analyses in her paper on *Russia's Afghan Policy* asserted that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was a great mistake but it ought to be seen in the light of cold war rivalry between the two super powers representing two different blocks. The second mistake was the abandonment of Najibullah by the Soviets as they had no clear thinking. Najibullah was abandoned as he was adopting the policy of national reconstruction, pluralism in economy and pluralism in politics. Afghanistan had become the point of convergence of Russian and Indian interests and these two countries were against the taking over of Kabul by the Islamic fundamentalist groups. After the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, Pakistan unfolded its design of geopolitical dominance of the region. Initially the Pakistanis had tried to establish their control through Hekmatyar. But as the stalement continued, they abandoned him and created the Taliban in 1994. As the Taliban were registering their successes, the Russian power

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was declining militarily and politically and there was an ailing President at the helm of affairs. But after the Taliban take over of Kabul in September 1996, Russians and the Iranians had come closer. A peace process was also launched in Tajikistan where the ex-communists and the Islamist forces formed a coalition government in Dushanbe. In the Chechnyan war, Russians alleged, the abettors were from Pakistan and Afghanistan. In January 2000, Taliban recognised the independence of Chechnya, which rendered a great blow to the Russians. The coming to power of Putin and the second Chechan war symbolises Moscow's authority to reassert itself. The Russians, after their experience in the war in Afghanistan (1980-88), are trying to form a coalition, strengthening the Collective Security Treaty, have initiated the formation of a working group with the United States and even through the Shanghai Forum they have raised the issue of putting up a joint fight against international terrorism emanating from Pakistan-Afghanistan region. Taliban is trying to divide the regional countries and trying to get into bilateral agreements with each of these countries and to an extent they have succeeded in their policy especially with regard to Uzbekistan. When Musharraf, Pakistan's Chief Executive, paid a visit to Kazakhstan he acknowledged that the Taliban is an important factor in Afghanistan.



*From left Dr. William Maley of Canberra,
Maj. Gen. (Rtd.) Afsir Karim, Yahya Maroofi from IOM, Geneva
and Prof. Marwin Weinbaum, USA*

SESSION V

The fifth session which dealt with Afghanistan and South Asia and Iran, was chaired by **S.K. Singh**, formerly Indian ambassador to Afghanistan and also Foreign Secretary of India.

I. P. Khosla, formerly India's Ambassador in Afghanistan in his paper on *India and Afghanistan* said that the support for unity and integrity of Afghanistan is being talked about by the world community. But only India has a real interest as other countries have only their own interests in mind. Secondly, he said that although Afghanistan is united, since 1978 the disunity of Afghanistan is gradually being promoted. India wants a stable and strong Afghanistan, specially due to the nature of its relationship with Pakistan. All the regional countries, ideally, want Afghanistan to remain divided so that they may be able to pursue their own interests by befriending their allies. However, a great deal of feeling of independence exists among the Afghans that India ought to promote to find a workable solution to the Afghan problem. Khosla added that one way of dealing with the problem would be to give humanitarian aid to the Afghans. India must work with Iran, Russia and Central Asian countries to provide them appropriate help. The Afghans are tenacious people and they must be encouraged in their efforts of independence.

Maj. Gen. (Rtd.) Vinod Saigal in his paper on *The Pakistan-Afghanistan Cauldron* stated that the 'Green International' was not initiated in the 1980s and it certainly did not start its operations from either Pakistan or Afghanistan. He said that it was in the 1970s that Islamic centres set up in London and financed by Saudi Arabia and the *maulavis* provided by Pakistan, began to preach radical Islam. Those Islamic centres had sown the seeds for the foundation of the Green International. The mobilisation of religious orthodoxy for its battle against an entrenched ideology- communism in Afghanistan, makes an interesting case study in itself. Of greater interest is the study of the chilling transformation that was engineered in the purely defensive mobilisation of the religious orthodoxy for vacating aggression, to one of offensive religious fundamentalism with pan-Islamic overtones. Religious mobilisation, by itself, could not have succeeded in repelling aggression

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without massive military and financial assistance from the outside. Pakistani military controls the nuclear arsenal and it is increasingly coming under the sway of the fundamentalists. It was a coupling of the military and the fundamentalists that had spawned the Taliban. The robust offspring is now a potent voice. It would be facile for the world at large to dismiss the hydra-headed monster, being spawned in the Afghanistan-Pakistan cauldron, merely as a regional problem affecting India, Central Asian Republics, Russia and some other countries. It is certainly a major problem for the neighbours and a universal dimension is equally important. The U.S. may reach an understanding with various leaders of the region and ask for the surrender of Osama bin Laden. But the fact is that they have not realised that bin Laden is just a public face of the deeper danger confronting them. In nearly 10,000 *madrasas* thrown across the Afghanistan-Pakistan cauldron, a few thousand bin Laden clones are well on their way to reaching productive maturity. Their testing grounds are USA and India. Is the world seriously expecting India to countenance with equanimity the Talibanisation of the whole of Kashmir? Has Talibanisation of Afghanistan brought peace and prosperity to the region? Has the creeping Talibanisation of the Pakistan army brought peace and prosperity to Pakistan itself? And, will the hypothetical Talibanisation of Kashmir bring peace to Kashmir valley? India is perhaps the only country that is serious in preventing any tragic outcome that may emanate from this region.

Prof. Kalim Bahadur of Jawaharlal Nehru University in his paper on *Pakistan's Policy in Afghanistan* said that Afghanistan has always occupied an important place in the Islamic vision of Indian Muslims. In the nineteenth century there was a Wahabi Movement led by Syed Ahmad that sought to build an Islamic state as the Indian Muslims had been seen to be polluted. Thousands of Indian Muslims flocked around him. From Patna he went and settled down at Sitana, a part of the NWFP. There he tried to form an Islamic state. However, he was challenged by the Sikhs and defeated in the battle of Balakot. Many of the later Islamic schools founded in India derived their inspiration from the famous Deoband School. Also, many of the modern leaders of Afghanistan were educated at Deoband. Some Pakistani Muslims like Aslam Siddiqui have

written that the Afghanistan-Pakistan bastion will provide the bulwark against any threat from the west and the east, i.e. from communist Soviet Union in the west and India from the east. This idea has not been given up and many Pakistani leaders have talked about the possibility of the merger of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Kamal Matinuddin in his book, *The Taliban Phenomenon- Afghanistan: 1994-97*, has written that the Durand Line never existed nor does it ever exist. This idea of Pakistan-Afghanistan unity, to forge a strong single state, has attracted many Pakistanis. Prof. Kalim Bahadur emphasised that the *Muslim League* based their demand for Pakistan on the basis of the two nation theory which implied that the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent were a nation and should have a separate homeland. The Indian Muslims have always had a very emotional link with Pan-Islamic links. The creation of Pakistan itself is an outcome of this Pan-Islamic unity.

Prof. K. Warikoo of Jawaharlal Nehru University in his paper *Shadow of Afghanistan over Kashmir* provided a perspective on the implications of developments in Afghanistan for society and politics in Kashmir in a historical frame. He pointed out that Kashmiri Muslims retain bitter memories of tyrannic Afghan rule in Kashmir (1753-1819) and the brutatities inflicted in 1947-1948 by Pak raiders many of whom were from NWFP and adjoining areas. Warikoo explained as to how the Soviet armed intervention in Afghanistan had its direct impact in Kashmir. Now the Muslim fundamentalist groups of Kashmir mobilised their cadres and ignited the radical Islamist passions among the majority of Kashmiri Muslims. Part of the arms and ammunition meant for Afghan *mujahideen* fighting the Soviet troops, began to be channelled by Pakistan for use by Kashmiri militants. Thus started the first phase of militancy in Kashmir in late 1980s. Subsequent events like ethnic cleansing of minorities in Kashmir, marginalisation of indigenous Kashmiri elements in the militant movements and its take over by Afghan trained and Pakistan based *Harkat-ul-Ansar*, *Markaz Dawat-ul-Irshad*, *Lashkar-e-Toiba* and *Jaish-e-Mohammadi*, are directly related to the activities of Afghan and Afghan trained mercenaries in Kashmir. For the past few years, the ratio of Afghan, Pak and other foreign mercenaries in Kashmir has been increasing. During May-July 1999, these foreign mercenaries alongwith

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Pak army launched the armed intrusion in Kargil, which was later followed by hijacking of Indian Airlines plane to Kandhar in December 1999. Prof. Warikoo stated that the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan and presence of Afghan mercenaries in Kashmir has contributed to the obliteration of indigenous social ethos and cultural heritage and the brutalisation and Talibanisation of Kashmiri society.

Dr. Smruti S. Pattanaik of Institute for Defence and Strategic Analyses in her paper on *Iran and Afghanistan* said that the Iranian interest and strategic objectives in Afghanistan should be understood in the context of the great power game that impinge on the security perception of Iran. It should also be understood that in the recent past Iranian policies towards Afghanistan have been a reflection of the intense power struggle within the Iranian elite. The collapse of Soviet Union and emergence of non-Persian and Turkic oriented states with ethnic based nationalism made Iran more vulnerable to the forces trying to undermine its territorial integrity. The potentiality of such an implication should be understood because Iran has minorities like Azeris, Kurds and Turkmens with extra-territorial ethnic linkages. In this context the rise of Taliban as a force with hardcore fundamentalist Sunni Muslim force is ideologically challenging to the Shias and other minorities in Afghanistan having serious implications for Iran. Since 1996, the Taliban have secretly backed Iranian groups who were anti-regime. Taliban has provided sanctuary to *Ahl-e-Sunnah Wal Jamaat* which recruited Iranian Sunni militants from Khorasan and Seistan provinces. From 1989-92, the bitter power struggle to control Kabul was played by the proxies of regional power having extra-regional support. Iran at present pursues a policy of maximising its interest in Afghanistan through common approach with countries having similar perception. For the first time after the Soviet withdrawal, Russia and Iran realized that they have common interest in Afghanistan since the Taliban is regarded as a force supported by the countries having anti-Iran agenda. Iran's interest in Afghanistan should also be understood in the context of pipeline politics. The emergence of newly independent Muslim countries of Central Asia with abundant oil and gas resources have made the region more vulnerable to extra-regional interferences. The emergence of Muslim countries in its neighbourhood

with abundant oil and gas made Iran strategically important to the West as well as to the Muslim world. After assumption of power, President Khatami of Iran and with the improvement of Iran-US relations there is a possibility of the Turkmenistan-Iran pipeline gaining support. Both the countries are apprehensive of the growing Sunni radicalism, Taliban treatment of women, drugs and weapon factor in Afghanistan.

Juhi Shahin drew attention to the plight of Afghan women under the Taliban, which has been characterized by Amnesty International as ‘the largest forgotten tragedy in the world’. Systematic degradation, humiliation and public floggings of women innocent of any crime are everyday events. Under the Taliban, women’s rights to participate in social, economic, cultural and political life of the country was drastically curtailed and later on totally abolished. Sexual crimes against women, gang rapes, lust murders, abduction of young females and even young boys, blackmail of families with eligible daughters, etc., are common place. The Taliban initially made a show of piety and of abhorring sexual crimes against women, but reports of their depravity are growing with each passing day. The Taliban, as a religious fascist group, oppose anything that implies liberty and progress. Their enmity to women’s rights, science, democracy, and the moral values accepted in today’s world, is unbelievable.



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