

The Changing Counters of Geopolitical Elements In Afghanistan from 1990 to 2001

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ABSTRACT

To Understand the present conditions, stability and Security of the of the Afghanistan one must traces the paste developments in Afghanistan. This article is a brief look of Afghanistan's turmoil condition from the last two decades of twentieth century. In the process of building peace no one can ignore the pact policies of domestic government and international interventionist politics. The article traces the historical roots of present turmoil between Afghanistan Government and Taliban.

Keywords: *Afghanistan, Taliban, Terrorism, Peace Building, Jehadi*

Article Publication

Published Online: 15-Jun-2021


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The stable government of King Zaheer Shah that came into existence after the 1964 Afghanistan Constitution was suddenly disrupted by a bloodless palace coup in 1973 by his brother-in-law Dauod. This abrupt change unleashed a series of politico-economic forces in the country disrupting the Afghanistan's fabric for the next five years. The Communists came to power replacing Dauod, and the subsequent power tussle in Afghan Communist party forced the former Soviet Union to march into Kabul in December 1979.

What happened afterwards is the beginning of a new great game in Afghanistan. The US saw it as an opportunity to teach the Soviets a lesson. Saudi Arabia looked upon it as a chance of the century to re-establish their predominance in the Islamic world in the name of helping the fellow Muslims, and teach a lesson to Islamic Revolutionists in Iran for their "misbehavior". Gen . Zia ul-Haq who came to power through a military coup, looked upon this Saudi-US involvement in Afghanistan as a god sent opportunity to rehabilitate himself in international politics. In this quest to defeat the Soviet Union, the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan never anticipated the long-term implications of the means they were adopting.

It is a part of the history now, how the cold war warriors in the US prepared the study material to convert the Afghan refugees into Mujahideen (holy warriors), Saudis-pumped in money and the material was published in Lahore and Karachi in Pakistan. The US and its allies across the world obsessed with the defeat of the Soviet Union were liberal in pouring money and material, ignoring all other strategic developments in the region including Pakistan's nuclear program. The global arms merchants looked upon the war in Afghanistan as a "unique opportunity".

The refugees turned Mujahideen proved no match to the professional Red Army of the Soviet Union. As the Red Army's success progressed against the Mujahideen three significant developments took place which changed the history of this part of the world. First, as the Red Army got involved deeper, the Pakistani armed forces started getting involved in greater numbers. The battle of Jalalabad in 1983-84 gave a glimpse to the rest of the world about the Pakistani armed forces foray into the great game. Second, the US and its allies started gradually enhancing the quality of equipment with shoulder fired stinger missiles being handed over to the Mujahideen in 1987. According to various estimates more than 70 countries participated in supplying arms; and altogether about

100,000 tons of arms were poured into Afghanistan where the war was taking place and to the "front line" state for launching the war in Pakistan. By the mid 1980s, some observers even felt there were more guns with Mujahideen than with the Pakistani armed forces. Lastly, the war stretched for more than eight years -- 1980 to: 1988. The ideological motivation given to the war by the US-Saudi Arabia-Pakistan brought about 100,000 people from across the Islamic world to help the Afghan Mujahideen. This resulted in a large number of people trained in guerrilla warfare readily available for any nation to make use of. In fact, in 1990 after Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Osama bin Laden is reported to have offered to Saudi King that Afghan Mujahideen under his leadership can vacate the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. In addition, the US, when once their objective of defeating the Soviet Union, decided to leave the obscure Afghanistan as a war booty to Pakistan. The US never anticipated that a failed state like Pakistan can never resurrect a devastated Afghanistan.

The permutations and combinations worked by Pakistan to establish a pro-Pakistani regime between 1989 and 1994 did not succeed. They started a new movement called Taliban-students learning in madrasas. There were two objectives, in the creation of the Taliban movement by Pakistan. The effective military component of the Taliban movement will be completely under Islamabad control. According to various estimates made by informed people, anywhere between 15000 to 25000 Pakistani military personnel were involved with the Taliban movement. At another level Pakistan thought that it could establish a confederation of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Apparently, the military planners in Islamabad visualized such a development will provide the needed strategic space for Islamabad. Strangely enough, the US endorsed the birth of Taliban on the rationale that it will provide peace and security in the faction fighting war ravaged Afghanistan. The arrival of Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan in May 1996, and accelerated pace of success of Taliban in subsequent months, and Islamabad's nuclear explosions in May 1998 have raised the spectrum of Taliban-guided Pan-Islamic world. By 1999 and 2000, media reports started appearing about the need for developing an Islamic army with the Pakistani armed forces becoming the core group.

It is around this time one started noticing in the Pakistani media that Mujahideen word was replaced with Jihadis (liberators). Also, Osama's al Qaida, after establishing an Islamic Front for Jihad Against the US and Israel (IFJ) in February 1998, started spreading its network across the globe. By 2000, the Taliban-al Qaida, that more or less combined together, managed to spread themselves across the four continents (Asia, Africa, Europe and North America) in over 70 countries. By this time most of the smaller neighboring countries, fearing Taliban-al Qaida combine and their support from nuclear Pakistan, started doing business with them. And the Chinese, the trusted friends of Pakistan, also started talking in terms of helping Afghanistan development is also the time a section of Pakistan's strategic community came in to open about Taliban model of development and war strategies as ideal. The Jihadis started talking in terms of "we have destroyed one Super Power and buried it forever (meaning Soviet Union). Now we can teach a lesson to anyone".

In all these developments, the al-Qaeda cadres attacked the World Trade Centre in New York and Pentagon offices in Washington DC on 11 September 2001. The US then realized fully the implications of Taliban-al-Qaeda to their national security. The subsequent war, Operation Enduring Freedom, by the US on the Taliban-al-Qaeda headquarters in Afghanistan from 9 October 2001, took about three weeks to break the back of the movement. With assistance from the left-over resistance groups against Taliban-al-Qaeda, Kabul was recaptured on 13 November 2001 and an interim government was established in December 2001 under Hamid Karzai.

The leadership of Taliban-al-Qaeda were smuggled into Pakistan by their sympathizers. The Taliban movement, which was projected largely as a Pashtoon movement by its creators and mentors, largely facilitated this operation. By this October, the war against the Taliban-al-Qaeda completed two years, but still the top leadership was elusive. At least till then.

The Karzai government in Kabul was finding itself a tough resistance for its governance from the Taliban-al-Qaeda elements. Sporadic guerrilla attacks were going on against the regime across Afghanistan, mostly in Southern Provinces by the Taliban-al-Qaeda leadership. Apparently, they regrouped themselves to launch a guerrilla war.

According to Meezan, a Dari Periodical published from Afghanistan, in its March 2003 Issue, said that the major adversaries of Karzai government are al-Qaeda, Taliban, radical groups from Pakistan, Hekmatyar audh is group from the erstwhile mujahideen cadres and Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence Agency. The magazine also disclosed that leaders of these groups and their mentors are based in Pakistan. They are running their offices openly in some places and clandestinely in some other places on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. They hold their meetings regularly in places like Quetta, Kandahar, Bajore, Paktia and other places everyone in Pakistan was aware of.

The Pakistani media in January 2003 even gave out details of some of the leaders of these groups about their whereabouts. For instance, Taliban leader Kabir was living in Charsadda near Peshawar (NWFP); Jalauddin Haqqani is living in Federally Administered Tribal Area, Waziristan and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar moves in and out of Pakistan at his sweet will. Similarly, there were reports about the establishment of an' organization called, Tehreek Azadi Salahuddin Ayubi (Salahuddin Ayubi Independence Movement) in Mirali North Waziristan Agency, with Mullah Omar as its supreme leader and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as its Chief. The objective of the organization was essentially to mobilize public opinion against the US.

There were also posters and handbills distributed in Balochistan and NWFP provinces of Pakistan reportedly by anti-Karzai government groups under Mullah Omar leadership. This pamphlet announced: "Those who have sold out their conscience and indulge in dishonesty with the nation do not deserve amnesty according to Afghan laws and traditions. The puppets have no right to call themselves Afghans. Such elements just for personal benefits at times support the Muslims and generally extend help to anti-Islamic forces. Such elements are not acceptable to the Afghans. The aggressor will not achieve their objectives in Afghanistan and they will not stay in peace. The Afghans are determined to safeguard the sovereignty and integrity of their motherland".

This also indicated that covert assistance is on from the official machinery of Pakistan to these groups. The reason for the official Pakistani patronage to the anti-Karzai government in Kabul is largely that later coming into power in Kabul resulted in a loss of Islamabad's strategic ambitions in south west Asia and in the Islamic world. This Pakistani perception is based on three facts-they are the second largest Islamic country; have one of the best professional armies in the Islamic world and above all they are the only nuclear power in the Islamic world.

In addition, the Pakistani security managers who protect the Taliban-al-Qaida from Kabul perceive that they have successfully out manoeuvred the US after the 11 September 2001. They felt that Operation Enduring Freedom launched by the US has just resulted in a regime change in Kabul; and they successfully moved out the leadership of Taliban-al-Qaida and their mentors and supporters were conveniently moved out to safer places. Apparently, all these groups now felt that having defeated the Red Army of the former Soviet Union, they can defeat another super power now sitting in Kabul. An extra element of optimism has been added to this perception because of a vertical split in the Pakistani polity about pro-Taliban-al-Qaida sympathizers in the name of MMA and others. The MMA in the two bordering provinces of Afghanistan-NWFP and Balochistan, had even elected representatives in October 2002 elections.

Rightly or wrongly, in the process of creation of Taliban in 1994, they tried to project it as a Pashtoon movement. This aroused considerable passion among the Pashtoon population living in Pakistan. The large migration of Afghan population (estimated to be over 3 million in mid-1980s) resulted in total distortion of the boundary line between the two countries. Further the creation of Taliban also resulted in a certain amount of ethnic identity among these groups. The last two decades of turmoil in Pakistan-Afghanistan is thus resulting in the creation of a movement for the homeland of Pashtoons. Some even argue that in the event of long-term presence of extra regional powers in Kabul, a separate homeland for Pashtoons like for the Kurds in northern Iraq after the 1991 US war against Iraq, it is inevitable to happen.

To these trends one can add a number of not so directly related incidents. These include, the US war on Iraq in March-April this year brought in an element of frustration among the popular mood in the Islamic world. This is already getting reflected in some of the Jihadis of the Taliban-al-Qaida breed moving to Iraq to build up a fraternity among the population. Along with the Pakistani covert supply of arms and ammunition, a large part of the arms and ammunition supplied in 1980s by the US and its allies, is still to be accounted, by Pakistan; and some of it is falling into the hands of Jihadis across the globe cannot be ruled out.

Even after nearly two years, the lone super power in the world was not able to help the regime in Kabul to consolidate. This clearly indicates the Jehadi leadership will adopt every conceivable means to hold their territory in Pakistan Afghanistan. The world is not sure about to what extent the Taliban-al-Qaida had gained access to the weapons of mass destruction. According to one theory a large number of scientists in the Islamic world transferred the technology for manufacturing WMD to the Jihadis. If this is factually or even partially true, the world may be witnessing a new warfare in the years to come.

In this backdrop in the fractured societies of Pakistan and Afghanistan various groups are bound to look upon every given opportunity to gain a foothold as much as they can in the coming months. From the Indian security perspectives in the immediate future things are not happening as they wish to. At one level, Pakistan and its border areas with Afghanistan continue to be the focal point of creating Jihadis. Neither the authorities in Islamabad nor in Kabul are able to turn the tide against the Jihadis. If one goes by Indian intelligence agencies reports, some 7,000 new cadres have been recruited during the 2000 year by some of the Jehadi groups in Pakistan. This implies that terrorism violence in various parts of the world including India can happen at any time. Equally important is in spite of international movement to stop flow of funds to terrorists, through the United Nations, according to informed estimates, this has come down by about 25 to 30 per cent only. The radical Islamic groups cleverly manipulated the public opinion in the Islamic world that the war is not against radicalism as it is being publicized, but is against Islam itself. This has resulted in donations continuing to come to Jihad outfits.

Above all, the Indian Republic had started debating what are the consequences of the emergence of a new state emerging in the existing state structures of Afghanistan and Pakistan. For instance, how India looked upon the emergence of Greater Pakhtoonistan in its neighbourhood. This may not be to India's liking.

Today it has become a country devastated by years of civil war which saw the worst forms of repression under Communist and Islamic regimes. The present era began in 1973 when the last king of Afghanistan, Mohammed Zahir Shah was deposed in a military coup by Daud Khan who was backed by the USSR. He overthrew the monarchy and proclaimed himself as the President of Afghanistan Republic. Daud was overthrown and killed through a military coup in 1978. This time Nur. Mohammed Taraki, having

links with the Clergy staged a coup. Taraki's rival Hafizullah Amin managed to secure most parts of the country-side. Suspecting that Pakistan with the support of the US might take over the country, Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev ordered the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, in the process Amin was murdered and the pro-Moscow Babrak Karmal was installed in power.

After the Soviet invasion in 1979, the United States undertook a massive covert operation, and with Saudi Arabia supported the Afghan Mujahideen by matching aid dollar for dollar. Gen Zia-ul-Haq had become the conduit of arms and supply to the Mujahideen. The US allowed Pakistan to be in charge of the US operation in Afghanistan. The USSR leadership, under President Gorbachev realised the futility of the campaign and signed a peace treaty in Geneva in 1988 under which the Soviets agreed to pull out from Afghanistan. When the Soviet troops pulled out of Afghanistan in 1988, the restoration of peace, stability and security was the core interest of the people.

The eruption of the civil war after the Soviet withdrawal, especially after the formation of the Islamic state of Afghanistan in 1992 destroyed the dream for rebuilding the country. As the Mujahideen took control of Kabul they decided to install a Tajik called Burhanuddin Rabbani in power. But the powerful Pashtun tribes of Southern Afghanistan did not like this. Meanwhile in 1996, the Taliban captured Kabul and installed its governments which became known for its rigid policies against women. Only three countries Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE recognised this regime. On September 11, 2001 the World Trade Centre was destroyed by suspected al-Qaeda terrorists and President Bush declared a war against terrorism the first theatre of which became Afghanistan. After some resistance the Taliban left Kabul to the coalition forces. Hamid Karzai, a former Mujahideen was installed as Interim President until proper elections could be held in Afghanistan.

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are on a definite low. There is a contradiction between the US position that is supportive of both Presidents but unable to establish better relations between them. Gen. Musharraf's ties with the Karzai government have remained uneasy despite direct efforts by the US and by both leaders to bring about a working relationship. The two governments have been at loggerheads, with Kabul questioning Pakistan's "meddling" in its affairs through the Taliban, Gen. Musharraf, who has been treading the Afghan ice carefully, suddenly cracked the uneasy relationship with his direct remarks against the Karzai government. The Americans, for whom both Presidents are men of equal importance, are not keen to take sides, although the deteriorating relations between the two is likely to be a matter of deep concern.

These are not isolated areas of either military presence or the turmoil that regime changes generally bring in. The world scenario has definitely undergone a drastic change after 9/11. It has changed the thinking on security issues and even political and economic ones. Neither the US, nor any of its alliances-that should include India, as a non-military participant, so far-are thinking in isolation. There are loud echoes in the vast neighbourhood. It is more than clear that the US shall maintain presence in Pakistan and in Central Asia, even if NATO forces take up the peacekeeping task in Afghanistan. There are repeated assurances that the US will not make the mistake it made in the 1990s. Zalmay Khalilzad, President Bush's special envoy on Afghanistan, who has a role in Iraq too, has said that the US will not "turn its face" from Afghanistan.

The role would still be as a UN peacekeeping force, and it will be the UN flag, and not the NATO flag, that NATO personnel will fly. It is ironic the way an angry, self-righteous Europe that opposed the Anglo-American campaign in Iraq, is riding piggyback on the same alliance into another war zone, Afghanistan. Preparations were on for NATO's induction, even as Europe, or at least the "Old Europe", was resisting a military involvement in Iraq. The US mooted the proposal before the UN in December 2002. And by February 2003, even as war clouds were gathering over Iraq and Europe was vociferously opposing a military solution in Iraq, the NATO Secretary General, Gen. George Robertson, told "Radio Free Europe" that NATO should have "a bigger role" in Afghanistan.

Since the 9/11 tragedy and America's beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Afghanistan stepped out of its political isolation of the Taliban era. Since then, this fractured state has been on a roller-coaster ride, at times situations posing to be normal while at the other appearing to deteriorate by the resurfacing of Taliban. During such unstable circumstances the nation has made remarkable political progress.

Afghanistan has been constantly in the news since 9/11. In the late nineties, this failed state became the victim of 'donor fatigue' and was forgotten by the world, despite the continuous efforts of the UN to bring this derailed state back on the track. There was complete anarchy during the Taliban rule and the term democracy was meaningless in Afghanistan. Situations changed dramatically after 9/11, with the beginning of U.S. - led Operation Enduring Freedom along with the help of 39 countries to root out Taliban and al-Qaeda forces from Afghanistan and along with this there was also a beginning to democratize the nation, which began with the Bonn Agreement. The goals of the U.S. led operation were first of all to crush the base of al-Qaeda and its Taliban. allies through military operations inside Afghanistan, secondly to begin a political process leading to a democratic new government for the country and finally to have a long term international effort to provide economic assistance for humanitarian relief and reconstruction of the country. This article gives an insight of the political progress made so far, how far it has been successful and finally looking into the future prospective.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai vowed to fight Islamic elements opposed to female education in Afghanistan. There are enemies of Afghan nation. We should wage jihad against them like we did against Soviet invasion in the 1980s, Karzai said in Kabul.

Afghanistan's former Taliban regime had banned schooling for girls and outlawed women working in public places in the country under the strict interpretation of Islamic laws. After the installation of a transitional government in Afghanistan, several female schools were targeted in different parts of the country by suspected Islamic radicals. Karzai said lack of educated and professional personnel was the real problem of the Afghan people.

The Karzai team had two women, with one of them the Vice-President. This was an extra-ordinary social change in Afghanistan because there was a time when women could not go to their homes without a male family member with them. The UN Security Council announced the unanimous adoption of resolution 1471 on March 28, 2003. This extended the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) until March 2004, proving a commitment to consolidate peace, aid reconstruction and assure representative government.

A string of incidents in Afghanistan revealed that there is mounting opposition to the presence of foreign troops in the country and to President Hamid Karzai's government which was being propped up by the international community. All over Afghanistan leaflets have been distributed denouncing the presence of foreign forces and calling for a Jihad against the "infidels and lackeys" in other words the government and Afghan soldiers fighting alongside the Americans. Hardly a day goes by without reports of an attack against US troops. In a speech to signal the end of hostilities in Iraq US President George W. Bush also mentioned Afghanistan and the efforts to rebuild the country. He claimed that "nearly a half of al-Qaeda's senior operatives have been captured or killed", but warned that the network was "wounded, not destroyed". He said, "We continue to keep the Afghan people laying roads, restore hospitals, and educate all of their children".

The Beginning of the Political process- Bonn Agreement The UN sponsored political process aimed at unifying Afghanistan under a legitimate central government began on November 27, 2001, in Bonn. Four Afghan groups finally signed the Bonn Agreement on December 5, 2001, by which the provisional arrangements were to be made until the establishment of the political machinery. A deadline of two and half years was set to achieve the targets of the Bonn Agreement, and Afghan Interim Authority (ALA) was set up for a duration of six months, which was to prepare the ground for the Emergency Loya Jirga (ELJ) scheduled to be held in June 2002. On December 22, 2001, Hamid Karzai was appointed the head of the AIA for a period of six months. However, the real power rested with three Panjshir valley lieutenants of late Ahmed Shah Massoud namely, Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, Defence Minister Mohammed Fahim and Interior Minister Yunous Qannoni which were the prominent figures in the Interim Authority.

After the dark past of more than two decades, the Bonn Agreement provided a ray of hope and chance of a better future for a fractured state of Afghanistan. The entire Accord was woven around the hope of making the nation free from its corrupt past and providing efficient institutions. The whole process was supposed to take-off with the establishment of a broad based gender sensitive, multi-ethnic and fully representative government, elected through free and fair electoral rights by the Afghans. Though, a very impressive picture of the Bonn Agreement was presented on the stage but off stage a clear divide in the Afghan polity along the basis of ethnicity, tribe and language was reflected all through the negotiations in Bonn. Although the Agreement claimed that the interim officials were chosen on the basis of their "professional competence and personal integrity" but the fact was that they were chosen to offer patronage to different factions and to recognize the distribution of armed might on the ground. The positive outcome of the Bonn was due to U.S. pressure. No doubt, with the Bonn Agreement there was a beginning in Afghanistan of setting up of basic infrastructure institutions like the judiciary, the army and the police force, the constitutional commission, the election commission, banking, as well as drug enforcement and an independent human rights commission. The setting up of these institutions paved the path for the beginning of the drafting of a new constitution along with the other allied political developments.

The brutality of the Taliban regime and their non Afghan militant friends crippled Afghan civil society. As a result, Afghans became the largest refugees and displaced people in the world. In the last ten years the Afghans have been suffering from warfare and fighting terror forces in their land. However, at the end of the recent phase it is not likely to bring peace to Afghanistan. A vision for the future must provide progress, reconstruction and stability to the country but the present scenario creates serious doubts if they can be persuaded to opt for economic and social cooperation rather than confrontation and strife.

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