

Afghan Crisis; a Dilemma for Pakistan's Security and International Response

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Summary

After the events of 1996, the military establishment of Pakistan became obsessed with the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. It regarded the expected firm control of the Taliban on Afghan soil as confirmation of the protection of Pakistan's security as well as economic interests. The Pakistan Afghan policy had a certain mind-set which continued even after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, although the events drastically transformed the regional as well as international security perceptions, more so regarding the Taliban regime in Kabul. There was no possibility that post 9/11 the Pakistani establishment could have wriggled out of the mess, for which it was equally responsible.

The Pakistani government callously allowed the Talibanization of Pakistani society, inducting a culture of hate and bigotry, and on the external front alienated its traditional allies. Pakistan became a front line State not through its ability to undertake an effective role in the Afghan crisis but through the accident of being a geographic neighbor of that country. Therefore the establishment's claim that Pakistan must play a role in the making of the Afghan government was not accepted by those who were aware of the complexity of Afghan society and its links to international terrorism.

Introduction

International terrorism in its meaning and concept existed long before the Second World War but only gained significance as a political tool by the "weak" in recent years. In current decades Afghanistan became synonymous with acts of international terrorism and terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda. Associated with these was a broadly propagated misnomer "Islamic Terrorism". The significance of international terrorist activities was recognized seriously, when on 11 September 2001, the United States was subject to a massive terrorist attack, targeting the two symbols of the American might. The Twin Towers of the World Trade Center represent the economic pride of the American private sector while the Pentagon in Washington D.C. signifies the military might of the sole super power. As a

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result of these attacks, the intelligence agencies, the CIA and FBI, regarded as efficient tools of government, were severely challenged.

U.S. President George Bush quickly declared the high scale terrorist attack to be an act of war and the fallout of American fury soon began to generate heat on the suspected terrorist group of Osama bin Laden. Within a few days, Pakistan became the prime focus of attention of U.S. policy makers. The regional and international communities have long regarded the Pakistani establishment as a principal supporter of the Taliban and a sympathizer of Osama bin Laden. As far as violence goes, the Pakistani law enforcement agencies have a bad record, as there remained a complete apathy for the daily terrorist related murders on the streets of Pakistan and the suspected terrorist gangs were allowed to operate as the establishment looked on the other side. The leaders of these violent groups were frequent visitors to Kabul and Kandahar. In these circumstances it is no surprise that Pakistan was pushed to the wall with practically no option left but to succumb to the demands of the United States, either to be an active supporter and to confront the Afghan based terrorists or to be branded a partner of the regional terrorist gangs. On September 15, 2001, President Bush remarked:

I am going to describe to our leadership what I saw: the wreckage of New York City, the signs of the first battle of war.

We're going to meet and deliberate and discuss - but there's no question about it, this act will not stand; we will find those who did it; we will smoke them out of their holes; we will get them running and we'll bring them to justice. We will not only deal with those who dare attack America, we will deal with those who harbor them and feed them and house them.

They will try to hide, they will try to avoid the United States and our allies - but we're not going to let them. They run to the hills; they find holes to get in. And we will do whatever it takes to smoke them out and get them running, and we'll get them. We put before the Pakistani government a specific list of things that we would like cooperation on, and they've agreed to all those items. I'm not prepared to announce today what those specific items are. But the Pakistani government was very forthcoming and we're appreciative.¹

¹<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010915-4.html>

The United States started its combat operations against Afghanistan from October 7th and within one month the Northern Alliance supported by the American airpower were able to capture Mazar-e-Sharif and a month later, the last major city - Kandahar - came under the control of the newly installed Kabul regime. The events in the war-stricken Afghanistan moved at a drastic pace - the Taliban in quick succession conceded the fall of seven provinces including Mazar-e-Sharif, Jauzan, Takhar, Samangan, Bamiyan, Baghdees and Farab to the Northern Alliance. These were considered the seats of government for the Northern Alliance before being driven away by the Taliban forces in September 2000. The Northern Alliance also captured Kabul, Kunduz, Herat and Jalalabad with similar swiftness. Mazar-e-Sharif was important for the coalition strategists, as it provided a land route to Uzbekistan, where a large contingent of American troops was stationed, while Kandahar and Jalalabad were the power centers of the Taliban.

A dramatic change in the Afghan situation left the regional countries grasping for explanations and even the coalition's estimates of the Taliban military capacity seemed over-estimated - they just fell like a house of cards and vanished in thin air. Their retreat from their "strong holds" took place with astonishing speed. It is believed that there were more than 20,000 Taliban fighters and their supporters in the Pashtoon majority city in the North.²

There might not be a similar instance where a fighting force submitted in a manner that it was armed to the teeth - with their tanks, jeeps and rocket launchers and least of all the smiling faces. The reality is that without the American heavy bombing for over a month, the Northern Alliances could not have made any progress.

Soon after the Alliance's assault the American President George Bush, while responding at a press conference with the visiting Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf said that: "We share a common view that in order for there to be a country that is stable and peaceful on this good leader's western border, that any power arrangement must be shared with the different tribes within Afghanistan. A key signal of that will be how the city of Kabul is treated." But the British Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon was quick to contradict this statement by admitting that their troops in Afghanistan were working alongside with the Northern Alliance "as they advanced on the capital Kabul". No matter what the American President said at this moment and no matter what shape the coalition's strategy had for the future, it presented a long drawn thorny conflict with serious regional repercussions.

²Syed Farooq Hasnat, "Taliban: A House of Cards", Weekly Independent; November 29, 2001.

The Americans have a discreet agenda in Afghanistan and they do not want external factors to influence their ultimate objectives. Promises of yesterday cannot withstand the hard realities of today.

The Afghan Perplexity

In April 1988, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the United States signed an accord providing for Soviet withdrawal, and the return of Afghan refugees. The Geneva accords stipulated that Washington and Moscow should oversee and guarantee the plan. But, the Americans lost interest in Afghanistan, once their interests were served, while the Soviets disintegrated. Though the Pakistani establishment played an initial role by providing a platform for the Afghan factions to discuss their differences this was not enough as a responsible active neutral - to supervise reconciliation within the Afghan factional groups. Continued conflict left the country at the mercy of adventure and plunder.

Afghanistan had been unstable since the Soviet Invasion in 1978, which ultimately split Afghanistan into zones of war lords. Within the flurry of global post-cold war readjustments and regional armed conflicts, Afghanistan posed one of the most complex and hard tasks for traditional peacekeepers. The United Nations and regional groupings, such as the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), were reduced to mere spectators. On September 11, 1996 the Taliban captured the eastern city of Jalalabad and within two weeks were able to take control of Kabul. In the process, villages and cities fell without any resistance. Frustrated with the bickering of the warlords, the Afghan people supported the Taliban, for peace and stability.

It is well known that when the Taliban emerged on the Afghan scene, there was total chaos in the country and the warlords were engaged in brutality, rape and other gross violations of human rights. Those who supported the Taliban militia expected much saner and balanced behavior from the newly arrived. The Taliban leadership under semi educated Mullah Umar failed on all accounts. The militia fell short of understanding certain hard realities of statecraft. Their behavior towards the regional and the world community was beyond any logical explanation. After all, Islamic history is full of the science of statecraft, diplomatic maneuvering and dealings with its adversaries - but the Taliban had their own narrow tribal-based agenda. There was little understanding of the genuine Islamic norms and no attempt was made to learn from religious scholars in other communities or for that matter from within their own immediate surroundings. General Kamal

Matinuddin quotes Qazi Hussain Ahmed, Chief of the Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan, in his book *"The Taliban Phenomenon"*, who expressed his disappointment in the credentials of the Taliban leadership. The Jamaat chief is reported to have remarked about the Madaris, from where the Taliban leadership received their basic learning that "education was not being properly taught as the teachers were uneducated maulvies."³

Earlier in December 1999, Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN Secretary General's special representative for Afghanistan, visibly disappointed by the ongoing war and foreign intervention in Afghanistan remarked: "everybody knows some of the countries around Afghanistan are directly helping the war efforts". He further said "Afghanistan is a war-torn country. It is a country that does not produce fuel, it does not produce food, it does not produce cloth and, above all, it does not produce weapons. It is true that the Russians did leave plenty of weapons; it is true that many of the tanks and planes that were left by the Soviet Union are still being used. But these need spare parts, above all they need ammunition and these have to come from outside and they have to be brought in through the land, territories or air space of the neighbors".⁴ The implications for Pakistan in the on going civil war were recognized at an international level.

Ultimately, Afghanistan would present a perplexing scene, harder to comprehend even for those who had followed the Afghan situation since the Soviet invasion of that country in 1979. The frequent shifting of alliances and loyalties by the factional warlords made the country suffer; despair extended and all norms of progress vanished. But this time, no external force was directly responsible for their plight and they had only themselves to blame.

Fall out on Pakistan

Even after the Soviet withdrawal, Pakistan continued to present itself as a front line State, not by its ability to perform an effective role in the Afghan crisis but as an accident of being a geographic neighbor of that country. Thereby, the establishment's claim that Pakistan must play a role in government making in Afghanistan was not accepted by those who were aware of the complexity of Afghan society and its links to international terrorism. Pakistan lacked an appropriate capacity to perform any such feat politically, economically and above all, it should have refrained on respectable friendly

³ Kamal Matinuddin, *Taliban Phenomenon: Afghanistan, 1994-1997* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002) Fourth Impression; p. 39.

⁴ Dawn, 08 December, 1999

grounds. The Pakistani establishment had been under strict scrutiny by the U.S. government and in this regard Secretary of State Collin Powell said, "I think we should stop saying, Can we trust (them)? Can we trust? We will see what they are going to be able to do". There was no possibility that post 9/11 the Pakistani establishment could have wriggled out of the mess, of which it was accused of being responsible. Whether it liked it or not, Pakistan was destined to serve American security interests and soon became an active party to military operations against Afghanistan. The then Foreign Minister of Pakistan Abdul Sattar tried to justify the Pakistani commitment to American demands and attempted to use the cover of international law by saying that the policy shift was due to the "United Nations Security Council's resolutions". On September 8th, just three days before the terrorist attacks, the Pakistani Foreign Minister said that Pakistan enjoyed good relations with Kabul and that sanctions against that country were not justified. He went on to elaborate,

It has been our view that a policy of engagement with the government of Afghanistan is better than a policy that seeks to isolate them and push them against a wall. The sanctions that are imposed are one-sided... This policy needs to be reviewed in our view so that it is both a constraint and an incentive for all parties within Afghanistan to engage in peaceful settlements.⁵

Pakistan's involvement with Afghanistan and its subsequent role as part of the war against international terror has a history. Foreign volunteers from various nationalities went to Afghanistan, convinced by the Taliban leadership that their hosts were fighting a jihad against evil forces. In the case of the Pakistanis, the leaders of "Talibinised" religious groups provided support to the Taliban militia. This section of the semi educated Pakistani clergy was responsible for the slaughter of thousands of youths, who went to Afghanistan at their behest. In many cases, their parents were not even aware of the real intensions of those who taught them at the madrassas. The principal violator in this tragedy was the Amir of Tehrik-I-Nifaz-Shariat (TNSM), Maulana Sufi Muhammad who was instrumental in leaving behind (all in the name of fighting a Jihad against the United States) more than eight thousand young people in Afghanistan, while he returned to Pakistan, gasping for his life. He was arrested and jailed for three years by the Pakistani authorities. According to one report, hundreds of those abandoned were killed in Mazar-I-Sharif, while an unknown number of innocent youths were trapped in besieged Kunduz. The TNSM admitted that more than three thousand of their "brain-washed" young boys were missing and they had no information whether they were dead or imprisoned.

⁵Dawn, 08 September, 2001.

Afterwards, the so-called Jihadi group pleaded with the “infidel” Northern Alliance to release those who were left behind on the war fronts in Afghanistan. A 13-member delegation visited Afghanistan to impress upon the Northern Alliance their “gravest gaffe”. Interestingly, the appeal was not made in the name of Islam but on reciprocal nationalist considerations. Haji Roohullah, a representative of the TNSM was reported to have said that his delegation would impress upon the Afghan conquering leaders that they should consider that Pakistan had been a “place of refuge for over two decades”. He further said, “We will impress upon the leaders to show the same magnanimity and large-heartedness.” These reckless acts not only were responsible for the loss of precious lives but also brought a bad name to the country; damage that would take decades of hard work to be erased.

The supporters of the so-called religious extremist leaders in Pakistan are as ignorant as their benefactors, the Taliban. Most of the students in their Madrassas are from the poorest of the poor communities and their main motivation is to receive free food and clothing from these institutions. There are some who are attracted towards these self styled religious groups as they provide them with much needed identity, which they otherwise cannot achieve in the corrupt and callous socio-economic setup of Pakistan. Thus, left in the lurch by society, they become easy prey to the whimsical desires of the Maulvies. The respective governments in Pakistan should have had enough courage to accept at least some responsibility for the ubiquitous massacre of Pakistani youth and the tragedy of the Afghanistan debacle, on at least four accounts.

1. One, the establishment in Islamabad failed to provide basic facilities for less privileged families and as a consequence, they were lured in by vested interests.

2. Secondly, they looked the other way when the so-called Jihadi groups started to send their recruits to take part in the Afghan civil war. The Islamabad establishment cannot exonerate itself by saying that the Pakistanis crossed the border without proper documents or permission. If they did so, it in itself is a failure of the authorities to perform their assigned duties.

3. Thirdly, the Pakistani establishment knew that gross violations of human rights in Afghanistan existed and no attempt was made to discourage that. An explanation that Afghanistan is a sovereign country and therefore Pakistan should not interfere in its affairs does not stand, as it is well known that Pakistan could, if it wanted to, exercise sufficient leverage on the Kabul

rulers. A regular parade of Taliban officials in the five long years, to and from Islamabad negates all the excuses.

4. Fourthly, Pakistan continued its diplomatic links with the Taliban regime, even after the fall of Kabul, falsifying its previous stance that it recognises governments that control the Afghan capital. It was at the American "scolding" that the Embassy in Islamabad was closed.

The Pakistani establishment had presented a rigid policy position when it came to Afghanistan, caring little for international opinion or even the larger interests of Pakistani society, as demonstrated by the above quoted utterance of the then Foreign Minister. Pakistani inept policy makers tried to play a "role", which was beyond their capacity. Before the start of the Afghan-American war, Pakistan's attitude indicated that it was unable to conduct itself as a responsible State and as explained before, instead of adopting the role of peacemaker, it opted to become a party in the Afghan civil war. All this was done even after the U.S. Administration and Congress had expressed serious reservations about Pakistan's policy positions, towards Afghanistan.

If one examines the statements of the government of Pakistan's functionaries, since the happenings of 9/11, an impression is given that instead of designing a clear-cut policy towards Afghanistan, there was a lack of conviction as well as confidence in Islamabad. A segment of the population read it as a signal of sympathy for the Taliban while others interpret it as outright support for the American position against international terrorism. Another part of the population was of the view that the government in Islamabad accepted the American conditions under duress. There are still others who firmly believed that the decision makers were playing "hard to get" with the Americans.

The reality is that the government wanted to keep all parties guessing and satisfied at the same time. There was a serious danger which goes together with this policy - that with the arrival of the ultimatum, it could have annoyed all actors in the Afghan riddle and would have destabilized society still further. As a consequence, the people of Pakistan remained confused and the apprehensions regarding the wrong messages being sent to the wrong people remained strong. It could have become grim if the international community's perception was not positively corrected, notwithstanding that on a number of occasions, assurances were made to the international anti-terrorist coalition that every effort would be made to go along with the new fight against terror.

In the days following 9/11, at least two high-powered Pakistani delegations visited Kandhar, apparently requesting Mullah Umar to listen to reason and take appropriate steps to defuse the situation. The delegation of September 29th was assigned to convince the Taliban to take notice of the requirements of changing global realities. The demand also included releasing arrested aid workers. No other than Mullah Umar's teacher formed a part of the good-will delegation from Pakistan. On their return, one of the companions of the ten-member delegation said, "We did not discuss Osama. Osama was not on our agenda". While the Afghan Council in Karachi explained: "It is not possible that clerics of such a caliber would make such irresponsible demands, because without evidence the Americans would never give up a person, so why should we be expected to do that?"⁶ Even a list presented of 40 Pakistani terrorists who had taken refuge in Afghan territory was not entertained. The visit of the Pakistani delegation and the reaction of its members generated more suspicion than it contributed anything of the sort towards the already hostile international environment against terrorism.

The above examples clearly demonstrate that from the Pakistani side, little progress was made in solving the crisis. The enigma is that similar ideological views pushed the Talibanised Pakistani clergy, to be more inclined towards Afghanistan. Not long ago, one of these leaders was on record as having said that if a choice had to be made between the two countries, he would choose Afghanistan. Reacting to the second delegation's return, a Foreign Office spokesperson sheepishly admitted that "both the Afghan leadership and Ulema have reaffirmed their commitment to the security, safety and integrity" of the two neighboring nations. He further said that both the parties agreed to be in contact with each other and that another meeting might take place "as and when necessary". Such casual remarks during the fast moving events, which threatened Pakistan's security, spoke volumes for themselves. The official announcement reflected a lack of clarity and the proper management crisis riddle of the country's Afghan policy.

Furthermore, it seemed clear that the Taliban and their Pakistani supporters had little comprehension of the developments around them and had no clue regarding the security hazards to Pakistan or alternatively they were receiving wrong signals from Islamabad power circles. It was said by Mullah Umar's critics that the Kabul militia was completely ignorant of the complications of the regional as well as global system and that they operated purely on pre-Islamic tribal traditions.

⁶The News, 29 September, 2001.

On the one hand Pakistan continued its efforts to engage the Taliban regime, but at the same time was quick to ban Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, a Kashmir related organization and froze the accounts of the Al Rashid Trust, as desired by the United States and the United Nations Security Council's unanimous resolution of September 29th which said in part: "Freeze without delay the resources of terrorists and terror organizations". It also demanded that member countries should "deny safe havens to those who finance, plan, support or commit terrorist acts, or provide safe havens".

In short, even at that critical post-9/11 time, the Pakistani establishment could not coordinate its Afghan policy, within the country and with the international anti-terrorist coalition, as well. In reality, ever since the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, it had not had a long-term strategy on the Afghan situation. Time and again it was proclaimed that external interference in Afghanistan always met with failure, in particular in reference to the British and the Soviets. But those who proclaimed the loudest violated this basic principle themselves. Pakistan under Benazir Bhutto's second tenure (1993-1996) never hesitated to interfere in Afghan affairs, a tradition that was carried on by successive governments. These regimes nourished and encouraged the Taliban in their civil war against the Northern Alliance, caring little for the growing civil rights violations of Kabul and ignoring the vital interests of Pakistan. In private, the elected government said that the military establishment was in charge of Afghan policy.

It took General Pervez Musharraf more than three months after 9/11 to admit that the Taliban-backed Pakistani extremists were responsible for the sectarian killings in Pakistan. He said during his address to the nation:

They (extremists) are indulging in fratricidal killings. There is no tolerance among them...Look at the damage they have caused. They have murdered a number of our highly qualified doctors, engineers, civil servants and teachers who were pillars of our society...These extremists did not stop here. They started killing other innocent people in mosques and places of worship.⁷

General Musharraf's pronouncement was not made as a matter of concern for Pakistani society but as a result of international pressure, led by the anti-terror campaign of President Bush. The problem of extremism had existed since 1996, with the advent of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Even during the midst of the post 9/11 fallout, a mind set was visible in the Foreign Office

⁷Daily Nawa-e-Waqt, 12 January, 2002; Translation from Urdu by the author.

and amongst the various sections of the ruling elite that Pakistan must obstruct any settlement, which would dislodge the Taliban from Kabul and they regarded it as a perfect model for preserving Pakistan's security interests. It is against this backdrop of misperceptions and misjudgments that a former foreign minister had to express his apprehensions in these words:

A word of advice to Pakistan: difficult days are ahead for us. There is no need for us to panic. But let us be clear where we stand. While America simmers with rage, Washington will be less tolerant towards us. There are those in the US who have indicated that parts of Pakistan can be hit. The hawks must be advising Bush to hit Pakistan's missile and nuclear installations. Washington will be in no mood to accept Islamabad's explanations and reasons.⁸

However, the reality was far from that which the Pakistani elite perceived. As a direct result of interfering in Afghan affairs, Pakistan society had to confront at least two evils. One in the form of branding themselves with the terrorists and the other related to the ideological decay in society. The first is reflected in the worldwide and regional suspicion of Pakistan's involvement in international terrorism thus isolating Pakistan, both in regional as well as in international environments. Most dangerous of all, Pakistani status as a responsible nuclear power came under strict scrutiny. Even in the hour of dire security risk, no regional country was prepared to establish close diplomatic coordination with Pakistan and the government found it extremely difficult to invite itself even to the friendliest of the friendly Muslim community of nations. Pakistan's contacts could not extend beyond telephone conversations. The rest of Afghanistan's neighbours had established. Afghan-related contacts with regional nations. To illustrate, during the midst of the Afghan crisis, Iran's Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi visited Lebanon, Syria and above all Egypt with whom it does not enjoy cordial relations. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members stepped up their coordinating efforts and the same applied to the Central Asian Republics.

The other adverse fall out from interference in Afghan affairs was the distorting of traditional Pakistani society, hitting at its ideological roots, notwithstanding the gun and drug culture. Pakistani society was constructed on the promises of love and peace. The Sufis and poets like Shah Abdul Latif Bhatai, Khwaja Ghulam Farid, Waris Shah, Rehman Baba, Khushal Khan Khattak, Bullay Shah and many others for centuries preached message of love, kindness, compassion and tolerance. Under the influence of

⁸Sardar Aseff Ahmad Ali, "A Defining Moment for the US", Dawn, September 16, 2001.

these saints Pakistani society knew no other norms but of Islamic tenderness, until a few decades back, Talibanisation started to take root in the land. While successive governments looked the other way, the creed of religious cults and gangs introduced hate, murder and bigotry in the minds of Pakistani youth. Murder and attacks on the mosques of those who resisted this alien creed became a common occurrence. Taking advantage of rampant poverty and unemployment, the youth were taken from their mothers' laps, brain washed and dispatched un-prepared to the war-zones, in the Afghan civil war, where either they disappeared or their dead bodies arrived home. All this was done in the name of jihad. The Taliban had declared their civil war with the fellow Muslim Northern Alliance as a holy war and a self-styled Fatwa was issued in this regard.

Inculcated by the Talibanised Mullas of Pakistan, this passion of hate devastated families all around Pakistan. Love and compassion gave way to the new language of extremism and terrorism. The language of firearms became a fashion of the time and in this process gradually Pakistani society lost its honor, dignity, sanity and above all its balance as it succumbed to the alien culture and habits. The networks established by Talibanised Pakistanis had close contacts with the Taliban and probably with Osama bin Laden as well. According to a reliable estimate, in Karachi nearly 70 doctors became victims of religious fanatics and, "significantly, 56 belonged to one sect." One cannot agree more with the September 10, 2001 conclusions of an editorial of a leading English daily. It read "One can understand the Interior Minister's despair at the attitude of those sectarian groups which have become inured to the aggressive assertion of their brand of religion, ... If they fail to see reason, peace and security of the people and, indeed, the future of the country cannot be made a hostage to their wishes."⁹

In order to regain its honor and to eliminate the culture of hate and bigotry, the honorable solution for Pakistan would have been to adopt a rigid "hands off policy" on Afghanistan. Pakistan was accused of colonial tendencies towards its western neighbor. In an October 2001 interview, Dr. Stephen Cohen, an expert in Pakistani affairs, said that Pakistan had been following a policy of colonization in Afghanistan. Along with that, efforts to eliminate militancy from Pakistani society became essential. It was feared that if American planners felt that the government in Islamabad was too weak to protect the nuclear facilities from extremist groups, they would not hesitate to incapacitate these precious strategic assets. Already a hint had been given in a September 30th, 2001 CNN interview of General Pervaiz Musharaf. He was asked "would he destroy the nuclear installations, if they

⁹ Dawn, September 10, 2001

were in danger of falling into the hands of militants?" This pointed question to the Pakistani President said it all. It clearly reflected the thinking and apprehensions about the nature of Pakistan's delicate security dilemma.

The Pakistani Establishment's obsession with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan presented grave consequences for their country. It spoiled Pakistan's relationship with its traditional allies such as Iran, Turkey, the larger Middle East and the Central Asian Republics. At one stage, even China became apprehensive about the pro-Taliban posture and its fallout in Xinjiang province, bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan. The most negative effect of Talibanisation in Pakistan came when India got the opportunity to propagate and effectively neutralize Middle Eastern opinion and the indigenous Kashmir freedom struggle was "linked" with extremist elements in Pakistan via Taliban Afghanistan.

However, Islamabad's links with the Taliban remained one sided. At least on two vital occasions the Afghan government ignored Pakistani requests. One was regarding the safety of Iranian diplomats in Herat and the other dealt with the unwarranted demolition of centuries old Buddha statues. These incidents damaged Pakistan's credibility still further, creating more suspicion about its dubious dealings with the Afghan regime. It also proved how little leverage it exercised on Kabul. In the month of September 2001, United Nations monitors were stationed at the Pak-Afghan border - a direct consequence of Islamabad's bad Afghan policy. In these circumstances Pakistan became a villain in the Afghanistan episode, not only in the perception of the Afghan people but also for the International Community.

In some circles of Pakistan, the change in Kabul was regarded as a set back for Pakistan's security - but given the landlocked nature of the country, the new government in Kabul, as in the past, would remain dependent on Pakistan for its land route to the Arabian Sea. The real difficulty for Pakistan was that the conflict could be extensive in terms of volume and time and on the other side the domestic "hardliner genie" has become too big to cope. In short, the Pakistani establishment would be looking for measures to minimize the damage, to safeguard its nuclear and missile capabilities and avoiding an economic disaster. At the same moment full measures would be required to separate the Kashmiri freedom struggle from the frenzy of anti-terrorist "phobia."

Amongst the regional nations, Pakistan could be essential in helping to bring stability to this conflict-ridden land. It has the longest border with Afghanistan and thus the capacity to provide all needed logistic support to the landlocked country. Afghanistan owes its trade and social support to the

liberal passage policies of its eastern neighbor; Pakistan has close religious and ethnic links with Afghanistan; Pakistan provided a safe haven to the 3 million Afghan refugees that fled after the Soviet invasion; the Afghan Mujahedeen were provided with Pakistani passports and the borders were kept open for those who wanted to seek asylum in Pakistan; all Afghan leaders were given extensive Pakistani support against the Soviet invasion and they operated from Pakistani territory, thus subjecting Pakistan to frequent Soviet bombardment and sabotage activities in which thousands of Pakistani citizens lost their lives.

Afghanistan, Terrorism and the World Community

The fallout of America's largely undefined policy to combat terrorist groups and their activities around the globe gained momentum with each passing month. The Bush administration, in numerous policy projections, spelled out the "new American global objectives" and as a follow-up, the rhetoric of "war against terrorism" began to lose its balance as well as logic. Well defined international laws were openly defied and new meaning to State operations was provided. The events of September 11, 2001 overtook the value system established since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 and since then a new meaning to international security has been seen, in which the State has been provided with the authority to deal with its adversaries as and when it likes. The new rules have changed the concepts of State terrorism and those who have preached the noble principles of justice, rule of law and respect for human rights, for decades, have begun to tolerate the violations of human rights, in the pretext of a "war" against terrorism.

The transformed global background in which the Americans have laid down new rules of international and regional conduct has attained a sole authority to interpret global conflicts according to their own requirements. Now, the United States and its allies hold the prerogative to determine for the "global village" what is moral, proper and civilized behavior. The "civilized western world" has acquired "global legitimacy" to brand anyone whom they dislike as a terrorist, especially if it does not fit in the grand design of their national strategy. To put it simply, the American President has resolutely declared that "either you are with us or otherwise...." The violators, it has been determined, would face a barrage of daisy cutters, cluster bombs, F-16s and if the need be, even atomic weaponry.

The American Attorney General John Ashcroft supported arrests of Muslims after 9/11. He "justified the blanket arrests of hundreds of Muslim aliens and the practical forfeiture of their right of habeas corpus by the

exigencies of national security in a moment of extraordinary danger.”¹⁰ The Attorney General, in a similar argument justified the use of military tribunals - a move about which serious reservations have been expressed:

Unlike military courts martial, which preserve most constitutional protections, the tribunals would bear a closer resemblance to the closed and arbitrary security courts that the United States has criticized in Egypt and Peru, among other places. Each of these measures enjoys wide public support, but that may only emphasize that the wisdom of the Constitution is to protect minority rights even in the face of majority opinion. Law enforcement's scrutiny of Muslims in America high lights the lurking danger that the war against terrorism will be viewed by Americans and Muslims as a war against Muslims.¹¹

Nonetheless, the Americans were successful in constructing a fairly widespread coalition which ranged from NATO to Muslim nations of all shades, around the globe. Some of the coalition partners took unprecedented steps to support the American stance against international terrorism. These coalitions are described as follows:

For the first time in its 52-year history, NATO has invoked Article 5, under which an attack on one alliance member is considered an attack on all members. Also for the first time, the Australian government has invoked Article 4 of the 1951 ANZUS Treaty (a security treaty between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States) in order to meet this common danger. Great Britain, Canada, and Australia committed military forces to the coalition's operations against Osama bin Laden's terrorist network and the Taliban regime. France, Germany, and Italy have indicated that they may contribute military support personnel to a peace stabilization force in Afghanistan, as have several Muslim countries. Japan, in a major departure from its past reluctance to send military units overseas, has deployed naval warships in a support role. This coalition is remarkable not only because of the large number of countries involved from all around the world, but also the apparent recognition that the fight against terrorism will be a prolonged one that will involve diplomatic pressure and financial sanctions, as well as military force. Never in world history have so many countries combined together against a common threat in this manner.¹²

¹⁰Augustus Richard Norton, "America's Approach to the Middle East: Legacies, Questions, and Possibilities", *Current History*; Vol. 101, No. 651 (January, 2002) pp. 3-4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Paul Dibb "The Future of International Coalitions: How Useful? How Manageable?" *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Spring, 2002): pp. 131-132.

Conclusion

Unlike 1988, where Afghanistan was ignored by the international community, the post 9/11 scenario presents an entirely different thinking pattern. The international community recognized that the rehabilitation of Afghanistan was a vital step in the process of eradicating international terrorism. It was also believed that a strong and effective government in Kabul and the building of a socio-economic infrastructure would discourage any potential terrorist groups from establishing themselves in the far corners of impoverished Afghanistan. It was equally believed that appropriate education would discourage the brand of religious bigotry as witnessed during the Taliban rule.

Keeping the above apprehensions in view and to fulfill the described objectives, in December 2001 a conference in Bonn (Germany) was convened by the United Nations Secretary General's special representative Lakhdar Brahimi. The delegates comprised the representatives of the different factions of Afghan society minus the Taliban. There were also representatives of the big powers and the neighbors of Afghanistan. The special representative recognized that "there have been moments when we have closed our eyes to the suffering of its (Afghan) people."¹³ The formula for setting up a political framework for Afghanistan was agreed by the representatives of the Afghan factions. The modus operandi provided that there would be an interim Authority on December 22, 2001, which would be formed on the basis of an interim Administration responsible for the day to day functioning of the country for six months. After that an emergency Loya Jirga would be convened which would appoint a Transitional Authority for two years. Thereafter a new Constitution would be framed through which free elections would take place.¹⁴ Lakhdar Brahimi made it clear that "the underlying approach to the Bonn meeting was that the solution to the problems of Afghanistan could only come from Afghans. All the elements in the agreement were proposed by Afghans either here in Bonn or by those whom the United Nations consulted in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and elsewhere prior to this meeting".¹⁵

After more than three years have passed since the Bonn Conference, it can be said that a lot still has to be desired in terms of the rehabilitation of Afghanistan, notwithstanding the election of the Afghan President and

¹³ UN Talks on Afghanistan; Bonn, November/December 2001; Closing Session of the Talks; <http://www.uno.de/frieden/afghanistan/talks/closing.htm>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

apparent minimized violence. It is primarily the United States and not the United Nations that has taken charge of events in Afghanistan and economic reconstruction has lagged behind the political infrastructure that has been set in place though the difficult jobs of constitution making and elections, as an institution are yet to be finalized. Until the United States and its allies separate Afghanistan from their own nations security concerns and allow the domestic dynamics to take an appropriate place, genuine stability and reconstruction in Afghanistan will be a far-fetched reality.

Since the 1980s, Afghanistan has been linked with Pakistan in a number of ways. The basis being that no matter what happens in Afghanistan it has a direct implication for Pakistani society, whether as a result of regional compulsions or so chosen by the Pakistani establishment. The flurry of attacks on Afghan government troops and the American military deployments during the months of June and July, 2005, raised many new questions. These were not only in regard to Afghanistan's internal security but also relate to the fragile relations between the two neighboring countries. At least, as a part of a policy pronouncement, Kabul recognizes that its security is closely allied with that of Pakistan. On the eve of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's one day official visit to Kabul on July 24, 2005 these sentiments were reflected in an Afghan Foreign Ministry statement saying that "friendly relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan were "in the national interest of both countries and an essential component to promote stability in the region". On several occasions, similar statements have also been made in the past. However, when pressures increases, the relationship between the two countries deteriorates and both parties must start once again to reestablish ties.

The Afghan government continues to suspect Pakistan for being supportive of the militants in their country and in the present circumstances, there is little chance that Kabul could be convinced otherwise. The focal point of these relations centers around the conflict between the Taliban and the Afghan security setup. Pakistan is dragged into the Afghan dilemma, when it fails to manage the operations of Afghan related militant groups in its own society. Therefore, when it comes to Afghan militancy, part of the problem comes from within Pakistan. Musharraf's government is seen by many as ineffective, as well as indulging in dubious policies, whether sectarian or otherwise. The General's July 21, 2005 address to the nation vowed to eradicate militancy in Pakistan, but is regarded by observers as nothing more than his January 12, 2002 declaration to take charge of extremism and militancy in the country. The present "awakening" of Musharraf is attributed to the July 7, 2005 London Bombings, in which the suicide bombers were alleged to have visited a Pakistani madrassa.

On its part, Afghan society always presents itself in a package of dynamics and variables, which most of the time are difficult to manage by normal means. Past experience shows that the Afghans have yet to learn how to solve their conflicts and accommodate the other point of view while running government affairs. They have no experience in the modern concepts of legislative bodies, political parties or a structured judicial system. Whatever little they have, is confined to Kabul. In sum, there does not exist a political culture on whose foundations a modern society could be constructed. More so, with the brain drain since 1979, that went on unabated, Afghan society lacks an indigenous expertise to manage their country. Experience has proved that a divided Afghanistan, devoid of any functional institutions, is incapable of reaching any political solution.

There is still hope that the September 2005 parliamentary elections could provide a substantial betterment of the overall situation. But, Pakistan would continue to suffer from the fallout of Afghan mismanagement, unless the Pakistani government takes immediate strict measures to eradicate the Afghan linked militants. The noted aspect is that Pakistan has lost its credibility to perform any meaningful role in the divided and volatile Afghan society. Because of intense past interference in the Afghan factional conflict, Pakistan has conceded most of its neutral ground and is branded as an active partner in the existing militancy. In fact the Pakistani establishment is regarded as a major part of the problem. This view is also shared by some American officials, who regard Musharraf as not doing enough to stop the recruitment of the Taliban cadres. Now, the Pakistani government does recognize that its policies towards Afghanistan are closely connected with those of the war against international terrorism and that there is a triangle of relations between Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States.

In the circumstances, it is essential that Pakistan makes drastic adjustments in its Afghan related attitudes and puts its own house in order. That would provide an opportunity to depart from its defective perceptions of the past and set the record straight. Pakistan has another chance to amend its follies. It still has an opportunity to exit from the "Afghan muddle" that it had partly created for itself.