

PEACE IN AFGHANISTAN?

THE PROBLEM AND PROSPECTS*

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*The views expressed in this article are those of the author only.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict resolution and peacemaking is an incremental and painstaking task that may not bring immediate laurels nor does it make headlines. Yet the quest for normalisation and peace in Afghanistan, symbolised by the '6+2 Group' initiative, may present a new window of opportunity to the lingering Afghan imbroglio.

The Afghan story of the last ten years is a saga of missed opportunities, broken agreements and betrayed promises. Their leaders have left no stone unturned in their internecine fighting - the hallmark of which is countless intrigues, ruthless ambition and shifting alliances. Besides Afghans, their regional neighbours have also jumped into the fray, cynically promoting their immediate and narrow interests. The USA, the 'patron-saint' of the free world, became a friend of the Afghans during the 1980s in a bid to defeat the godless atheism of the former Soviet communist empire. In the process, it conveniently roped in Pakistan as a conduit for arms and equipment by assigning it the status of a 'frontline state.' Once the mission was accomplished, the Afghans were left in the lurch to fend for themselves. They fought the Russians with ferocious passion; after the Russian's departure they started fighting one another with equal relish and vengeance. The USA and other Western powers now consigned them to almost strategic oblivion - to bleed themselves to death and destruction in their intramural fighting. In the words of the Algerian diplomat, Lakhdar Brahimi, former UN mediator on Afghanistan, "Afghanistan looks like an infected wound. You don't even know where to start cleaning it."¹

THE PEACEMAKING PROCESS

Since the late 1980s, the UN has been involved in peacemaking in Afghanistan. The '6+2 Group' initiative was launched at the behest of the UN Secretary-General, following the resignation of Dr Robert Hall, who had previously headed the UN Special Mission to Afghanistan. The new task was assigned to Lakhdar Brahimi, who initiated the aforesaid mission in October 1997.

Initially, the Taliban government expressed deep scepticism about the '6+2' initiative since they considered it a partisan move as they were not given any representation in the UN. Brahimi's vision was to advance the peace process in war-torn Afghanistan by approaching the problem from the outside - meaning to end the supply of arms to the different Afghan warring groups. It involved parleys at two main levels: the '6+2' between the six neighbours (China, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Iran and Pakistan with Russia and US as guarantors) and at inter-party level.

The peace diplomacy gained momentum in March 1998 along with the Organisation of Islamic Conference meeting. The '6+2 Group' usually meets in New York during the UN General Assembly Session.

In September 2000, the meeting of the group, with foreign ministers representing, met in New York. Among other decisions reached, several members proposed a fresh embargo on Taliban, as well as

the opposition group, the United Front or Northern Alliance. This was to take effect if the efforts of Frances Vendrell, the UN special peace envoy to Afghanistan, yielded no progress by November 2000. Earlier, in September 1998, the foreign ministers held a meeting in New York and reached an understanding on a broad based government in Afghanistan; also, the Taliban and the Afghan opposition had met in Ashkabad and Tashkent in the '6+2' meetings.

PRESENT DEVELOPMENTS

Over the last two years, a concatenation of developments has taken place on the Afghan scene. On 8 September 2000, the Taliban were victorious against the opposition-led United Alliance, capturing territory in three strategic provinces in the northern Afghanistan that border Tajikistan - Takhar, Badakhshah and Kunduz.² The Russians have 25,000 troops (nearly 9,000 from the 201st army division and 11,000 border guards) manning the 1,500km border with Afghanistan under a military agreement between Moscow and Dushanbe. This has set alarm bells ringing in Russia and the bordering Central Asian republics because of fears of Afghanistan acting as a springboard for Muslim militancy and a consequent destabilisation of Central Asia. During a visit to India in early October 2000, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, underlined the need for a "joint front" to deal with "Islamic extremism" and "international terrorism," emanating from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.³ At the same time, President Putin's special envoy Mr. Yesterzhembsky, while visiting Islamabad, urged the Pakistani leadership to "rein in" the Taliban.⁴ On 11 October 2000, the presidents of Russia and the five CIS countries (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) met in Bishkek to formulate a security plan to run to 2005. At the meeting, the presidents discussed international terrorism, security threats to Central Asia, closer military and political integration and the formation of regional armed forces to counter threats from outside the region.⁵

Russian and Indian fears may seem somewhat exaggerated or contrived but perceptions more than reality count as both countries are currently faced with sustained militancy from Islamist guerrilla groups or freedom fighters (Chechnya and Kashmir). Both countries view the religious militancy as inspired and aided by the Islamic republics of Afghanistan and Pakistan, respectively. However, the Taliban regime strenuously denies this charge.⁶ Generally, the West, particularly the US, is also very critical of Afghanistan for its policy of terrorism, human rights violations (minorities and women), and involvement in narcotics, arms trafficking and spreading militancy. The Shanghai Forum is also contemplating enlisting India and Iran as members to fight the perceived Taliban threat.

TALIBAN: PLUSES AND MINUSES

While the Taliban have scored military victories against their northern opponents, the former in the last few years have demonstrated some positive signs. The facts on the ground are such that presently they control 90-95 percent of Afghan territory and have secured all the major cities, airports and borders. Moreover, since they have been able to bring normalcy and a modicum of security to the country, they contend that it is imperative that the world community recognise them soon and give them UN membership. Furthermore, according to Ahsanur Rahman, Afghanistan's geo-strategic importance (the passage of pipelines and trade routes from the Central Asian republics through their territory), the predominance of Pashtuns in their ranks, their political authority and unity of military command, and traditional wisdom and dynamism are assets which outsiders should not be lightly dismiss.⁷ Recently, the Taliban have limited poppy cultivation, tempered their harsh and obscurantist image of Islam by allowing separate but equal treatment for women in education, health and employment, permitted certain human rights organisation and encouraged some UN agencies involved in relief and humanitarian tasks.⁸ Mr. Abdur Rahman Zahid, the Taliban government's Deputy Foreign Minister, highlighted these measures while visiting the fifty-fifth 'Millennium' session of the UN General Assembly in September at New York.⁹

As for the attitude of Afghanistan's neighbours, there is some empathy from Uzbekistan, which once considered Afghanistan a 'hub of terrorism.' Lately, following President Islam Karimov's meeting with President Saparmurat Niyazov in Turkmenistan, there has been some mollification of the previous position. In fact, Karimov expressed this flexibility as a wish to start border trade and not to get dragged into war with a neighbour.¹⁰ Further, Turkmenistan is the only Central Asian republic that has enjoyed cordial relations with the Taliban government. This is because of certain peculiar

factors characteristic to that republic.¹¹ Besides, China, albeit wary of the separatist trends in its Uighur Muslim population of the Western Xinjiang Autonomous Province, is not as vocal in criticising the Taliban as, for example, Russia and the USA. China thinks that, as a neighbour, it is better to engage the Taliban rather to confront them. This conforms with its policy of maintaining peaceful relations with all its neighbours, regardless of ideological coloration. In fact, China is the only country outside the Muslim world with which the Taliban have good relations.¹²

While these seem positive indicators, on the negative side the Taliban face many difficulties and problems. Under international sanctions since November 1998, they are currently experiencing the worst effects of drought in the last thirty years. Nearly 90 percent of the population is dependent on agriculture. Famine conditions are affecting 8-12 million people with about 1.6 million facing starvation.¹³ A large number of Afghan refugees (nearly 1.4 million in Iran and another 2.2 million in Pakistan) reside outside and are unsure when or whether to return home.¹⁴ Many educated and skilled Afghans have emigrated to Western countries, depriving the country of trained and valuable manpower. All these people are urgently needed in the country if and when the process of reconstruction and rehabilitation is to start. Afghanistan is one of the most heavily mine-infested regions in the world and needs early and planned international de-mining efforts.¹⁵ The Afghan government, observes Peter Marsden, is very keen to seek UN and international agencies' help in tiding it over its acute economic problems.¹⁶ Some of these are caused by its own rigid policies, especially with regard to gender discrimination and their edict of barring women from working with international organisations.¹⁷

Another difficulty the Taliban leadership faces is that they have been unable to graduate from militia status to a proper political organisation that could mobilise the population. As a ruling militia force, they have to move rapidly up the 'learning curve' if they desire to be in sync with the outside world. While they have no doubt disarmed the gun-toting populace and brought a semblance of law and order to the country, they have to go beyond this and build traditions of good governance and civic society - the hallmark of a legitimate government.

While control of territory does grant the Taliban de facto status, the US government has maintained up to now that its recognition and admission to the UN "will not be based on how much ground Taliban have captured, rather it will be linked to their deeds," meaning thereby, the establishment of a "broad-based and legitimate government."¹⁸

While many protagonists of the Taliban are at pains to assert that their regime is united and is durable because of its ideological commitment, certain questions can be raised about this aspect. A student of Afghan history will hardly overlook the fact that there is a tenacious tradition of Afghans shifting loyalties abruptly and remorselessly for personal power, pride or financial inducements. During the last two decades, hopes for peace have been raised and dashed to the ground many times.

The 5 September 2000 military success of the Taliban in Taloqan, the capital of Takhar province, and later some areas in the north, following six unsuccessful offensives since the autumn of 1996, has again raised some nagging questions. Reports suggest that the intrepid Tajik military commander, Ahmad Shah Masood, the Uzbek warlord, General Dostum, and the former governor of Herat, Ismail Khan, are again regrouping their forces for a counterattack.¹⁹ In this venture, they are likely to be again supported by outside powers, viz., Russia, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and possibly Turkey. Moreover, within the country, pockets of resistance have existed since 1996-97 in the provinces of Kunar, Nanghar-Laghman and Sar-i-Pul.²⁰

A seasoned observer of Afghan affairs, Kamal Matinuddin, apprehends that even if the Taliban happen to control the entire country and start administering alone no durable peace will return due to liberal opposition and minority resistance. He adds that the struggle between moderate and liberal elements will continue.²¹ This view is corroborated by Colonel Imam who postulates that, in the event of Ahmad Masood's defeat and eviction from his lair of Panjshir Valley, he would bounce back with strong Iranian support and continue to pose a "constant problem" for the Taliban regime.²² Ahmad Rashid, another Afghan analyst, rather pessimistically observes that even if the Taliban subjugate northern Afghanistan, the Central Asian republics and the foreign oil companies

would not trust them and so would not build pipelines running through Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and onwards to Pakistan.²³

Afghans have a tradition of fierce pride, honour and spirit of independence like some other Middle Eastern and Caucasian people. In fact, the rich Afghan history which predates 1978 was that of a liberal society in which all religions (Hindus, Jews, Muslims and Zoroastrians) amicably co-existed. Their rigid, oppressive and obscurantist brand of Islam today is an aberration; music, literature, architecture and poetry were before part of rich mosaic of Afghan Islamic culture. During two decades of civil war, tribal culture has been mutilated leading to fragmentation with cleavages, both horizontal and vertical. This has, on the one hand, cut Afghans off from the inherent vibrancy and resilience of traditional tribal society and, on the other hand, ignored the contemporary state structures. In this way, concludes Ahmad Rashid, the Afghans are "bucking the entire trend of Afghan history."²⁴ Says Effendi, another prolific writer on Afghanistan:

"Unfortunately in Afghanistan, the so-called fundamentalists were as inimical to Afghan traditions as they were antagonistic to the communist ideology. The result is that by ignoring Afghan history and failing to elicit the actual demand of the people of Afghanistan, they failed to draw full benefit from the Soviet withdrawal in 1989."²⁵

Under the veneer of a cohesive force, the divisions amongst the Taliban are multiplying fast and more moderate elements may take over in reaction to Mullah Omer and the Kandhari ulema.²⁶ Imam, who was for years involved with the Afghans, opines that the Taliban will hold together as long as they remain focused on Islamic ideology.²⁷

THE TALIBAN BRAND OF ISLAM

Do the Taliban hold any role model for the Central Asians or Muslims in general? Given their phenomenal success, are they the wave of the future or, in the words of Kemal Matinuddin, a "transient phenomenon to a more stable political arrangement, or at worst a nightmare to the Western world and a problem for their neighbours."²⁸ Once coddled and now lampooned to the point of caricature by the West, the question can be raised: do the Taliban represent the humane, forgiving and progressive message of Islam as espoused by the Holy Prophet Muhammad through his many sayings and conduct in life? A hallmark of the Prophet's lifestyle was to forgive and forget even his worst tormentors and solemnly abide by compacts and agreements. On the other hand, the Afghan lifestyle bears a strong overlay of Pashtunwali (the Pashtun way of life) over Islamic values and principles. It is not uncommon for the Pashtun to easily spurn Islamic principles in favour of the Pashtun code of honour, pride and blood feuds.

Although Russia and some Central Asian states (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) have expressed concern about clashes between their troops and Islamist forces in the southern regions of their republics in August 2000, yet with the recent Taliban military success in the north,²⁹ their fears about export of Islamic fundamentalism seem somewhat exaggerated.

First, political Islam in Central Asia has never existed; it is cultural Islam that has been common at the popular level. Second, the independence of the Central Asian republics came about as a result of a sudden implosion of the Soviet state and no political ideology or Islamic movement was involved. In fact, in the classical sense, there was no such thing as a liberation or independence movement, although Muslims always carried a sentiment of oppression against the Soviet state. Third, the present leadership of the Central Asian republics is a holdover from communist days and expediently turned nationalist after independence. Fourth, socialism has secularised state and society to a considerable extent and no religious party of consequence exists, as compared with other Islamic countries. Notable standards of education, health, housing and infrastructural development in these predominantly Muslim republics rank them higher than many other Islamic nations located in their south. Fifth, still fighting for control of the remaining territory, the Taliban are neither free from internal preoccupations nor have they the necessary resources to 'export' their brand of Islam, which in any case is of a Pashtun mould.³⁰

However, in the event that the Central Asian leadership fails to control corruption or the wastage of oil resources, or to develop egalitarian socio-economic orders and promote pluralistic societies, Islamic activism may rise in a decade. Cultural awakening is taking place all over the region as the iron hand of the erstwhile communist system is being lifted. Of all the countries, Uzbekistan, with its densely populated and poverty stricken Fergana valley, is quite susceptible to Islamic extremism. The same could be said of the Osh region in southern Kyrgyzstan. Concerns about the influx of refugees,³¹ drugs, small arms and violence spilling over the border regions of Central Asia from strife torn Afghanistan cannot be ruled out. In fact, this phenomenon is already taking place. While the general public in these predominantly Muslim republics may still not be sympathetic to the militant and regressive Islam prevailing in Afghanistan, some radical and fringe Islamist elements are in touch with the Taliban and draw moral and material sustenance from them. After all, the Taliban fought against the atheistic Russians and they see the same communist leaders holding power in the Central Asian republics.

Needless to say, with independence, the Muslims of the Central Asian republics are now in better communication with the outside world. Hence, it is natural that they demonstrate a sense of solidarity with their fellow Muslims facing injustice and oppression in places such as Chechnya, Kashmir and Bosnia.

Moreover, the danger of an Afghan military starting a cross-border assault in Central Asia is farfetched as Afghanistan does not have a regular army. On the other hand, the Central Asian republics' militaries are fledgling forces that are still heavily dependent on the Russians. Among the Central Asian republics, only Uzbekistan could boast of relatively strong armed forces with the possible support of the US.³² Any major incursion from the Taliban may provoke strong reprisals not only from Russia but also from the Western powers involved in the 'New Great Game' in Central Asia. Besides, the Taliban presently have neither the incentive for a cross-border adventure nor the resources of a properly equipped armed forces. As Imam observes, "The Pakistan army is the only regular army from Wagah to the Volga river."³³ In fact, the Taliban, for their part, view the Russian military presence in these republics as a potential threat to their country as well as to the Central Asian republics.³⁴

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

Some writers have hypothesised that Afghanistan could hold out against the big powers as did, for example, Iraq, Iran, Libya, North Vietnam and Cuba.³⁵ The analogy seems rather overdrawn and unfair. First, most of these countries defied the US in the Cold War setting and were strongly supported by a countervailing superpower, the Soviet Union. Today, Afghanistan has to face not only the US, the only superpower, but also major powers such as Russia, China, Japan, the majority of European nations, India, Iran and its Central Asian neighbours. Second, some of those countries which put up a strong defence (Iran, Iraq) were endowed with rich oil resources which enabled them to stand up to US-sponsored sanctions and continuous pressure and intimidation. Also, the leadership in some of these countries was charismatic and nationalistic and fought the anti-colonial war of liberation (Libya, Cuba, North Vietnam). Third, most of these states were not as multinational in character as Afghanistan, which is composed of diverse nationalities at odds with one another. The Afghan's military defeat of the Russians in the 1980s was as much a function of Afghan jihad as the concerted moral, military and economic support extended by the US, China, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, the Western nations and many countries of the free world. Presently, Afghanistan stands as a very isolated country, facing international sanctions, plagued by economic problems, afflicted with drought and famine, festering with civil war and a victim of donor's aid fatigue. Nearly two decades of internal conflict has drained its energy, destroyed its infrastructure and resources, traumatised its society by fracturing it along many lines, caused massive displacement of population and refugees, made the countryside unsafe because of scattered mines and brought international apathy. As of today, only three countries have granted it recognition: Pakistan, UAE and Saudi Arabia.

What does the future hold for Afghanistan? Given the volatile nature of Afghan alliances, the only thing that can be predicted about Afghanistan is its unpredictability. However, the following main scenarios could be postulated: (a) no let up in the present state of mutual fighting and further hemorrhaging of Afghan society; (b) the Taliban militia forces gain complete control of the north

thus leading to the United Front's renewed opposition which is backed by external sponsors; (c) a UN cease fire and the establishment of a broad-based government; (d) the formation of a coalition government at the centre with maximum autonomy to various ethnic regions; (e) the balkanisation of the country along the Hindu Kush mountains into northern and southern Afghanistan.³⁶

The scenario that seems most likely in the foreseeable future is of continued see-sawing power struggle. J. Khan Sufi, in a perceptive study, criticises both the ideology of the left (Marxism) and of the right (Islamic fundamentalism) as foreign implants that have wrought immense damage to Afghan society and traditions. He draws parallels between the two ideologies and holds them responsible for renting the fabric of Afghan's Islamic Sufi traditions and pushing the pendulum from one extreme to the other. He laments that the chances of political reconciliation are becoming increasingly difficult. Further, he is of the view that Taliban power is the continuation of the Mujahidin in different form.³⁷

CONCLUSION

If Afghanistan is to remain a unitary, sovereign state, duly acceptable to the comity of nations, it has to move towards a grand reconciliation and show more flexibility in its domestic policies. A lot of other things have to move simultaneously in order to create a synergistic effect. First, foreign powers need to stop meddling in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Second, the major powers have to put more effort into the '6+2' initiative. Third, Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, Pakistan and Iran, have to bridge their differences over Afghanistan and, in their own national interests, ensure peace and integrity in that country.

After all, Pakistan, for the last decade, has been unable to capitalise on the much-desired opening of the communication route that would link it with the resource wealth of the Central Asian states. The civil war in Afghanistan has acted as a major impediment. In its quest for so-called strategic depth, Pakistan has instead earned a harvest of refugees, drugs, violence, terrorism, sectarianism and 'guilt by association' by too closely associating with the Taliban regime. As further sanctions are being threatened against the Taliban regime, Russia and US are forging greater links over perceived threats about 'Muslim terrorism.' In a recent UN moot, the Central Asian republics put the blame on Afghanistan for illegal trafficking of drugs and violence.³⁸

Today, the international community needs to constructively engage with Afghanistan but should insist that it is the Afghans who have to do the 'heavy lifting' for peace-making. Nobody needs peace more than the ordinary Afghans do. After all, more than outsiders, it is the Afghans themselves who have been their worst enemies.

Pakistan stands to gain the most if peace and normalcy returns to Afghanistan. In that event, the reconstruction of infrastructure, the laying of pipelines, trade and development, the export of manpower would act as boosts to Pakistan's economy. Many people believe that Afghanistan may need 15-20 years to re-build its war-shattered economy. On the other hand, the consequences of any 'Balkanisation' in Afghanistan are going to be grave for Pakistan and other neighbours.³⁹

As far as Pakistan is concerned, it must constructively engage with the Taliban regime. It needs to withdraw covert aid (if any) and close down all jihadi camps on its territory, maintain a check on Pakistani volunteers being trained by the Taliban, seek understanding with Iran and urge the Taliban regime to immediately end their hostilities by reaching a truce, improve their human rights record and form a broad-based government. As far as the issue of Osama bin Laden is concerned, the US should not make it a one-issue agenda with Afghanistan and deal with the Taliban regime separately.⁴⁰ Pakistan, for its part, has been equally a victim of violence and terrorism and strongly abjures any such acts anywhere.

In return, Pakistan could promise Afghanistan economic assistance⁴¹ and diplomatic support for a UN seat. At the same time, Pakistan must continue to strongly back the UN-sponsored '6+2' initiative.

While many regional and international forums have tried to tackle the Afghan problem, the recent Rome process envisaged the convening of the Loya Jirga for the resolution of the conflict.⁴²

Euripides, the Greek philosopher, once said that "when the Gods wish to destroy, they first make mad." The Afghan nation, after having valiantly defeated a superpower, has, ironically, turned on itself and got so passionately and recklessly involved in murderous infighting that it defies common sense.

While the US must share the initial blame for having ditched their former ideological ally after the military defeat and exit of the then Soviet Union, the regional powers jumped into the fray in the role of 'scavengers'. But, ultimately, the greatest sufferers have been the poor Afghan people. Their warlords, over the years, have relished killing and destroying, cynically switching allegiances, breaking compacts with abandon and opting for military solutions regardless of international opinion.

There is scant hope that Afghanistan's fragile civil society will be able to mobilise support against their wanton game of mutual destructiveness. Having become acculturated to violence for decades, these warlords have now become quite addicted to fighting. Today, they seem more afraid of peace breaking out than of war itself as they harbour the fallacy that soon they will be able to militarily overpower their opponents. More importantly, the Afghan nation was never so isolated, facing the ire of major powers and beset with economic problems. The latest round of fighting, in August-September, unleashed a fresh wave of refugees towards Pakistan - bringing dangers of epidemic and sabotage.⁴³ As Kenneth Waltz once said: "States are free to disregard the imperatives of power, but they must expect to pay a price for doing it."

This price is being paid by nobody other than the Afghan nation as the internal conflict interminably drags on. In fact, Afghans and their immediate neighbours have to put their act together. For the Afghans, the best way to predict the future is to "create it", says Peter F. Drucker. In the new millennium, as historical hatreds and burdens are being slowly cast away, yielding to an attitude of mutual reconciliation and accommodation, it is incumbent that Afghanistan should follow this trend, too.

It is high time that the Afghan leaders, major powers, regional neighbours, UN, and humanitarian bodies - share responsibility for bringing peace to the war-ravaged land.

1 As cited in Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, p. 206.

2 'Taliban Forces Capture Chal District: Fighting Moving Closer to Tajik Border: Russia', *The News, International*, Islamabad, 26 September 2000, p. 12. Also see the editorial, 'Back to the Taliban', *ibid.*, p. 7.

3 'Moscow, Delhi Working Out Strategy Against Afghan Threat,' *The News*, 6 October 2000, p. 10.

4 According to Yesterzhembsky, there was evidence of five training camps in Afghanistan in which several Tajiks and Uzbeks were being trained. *The News*, 28 September 2000, p. 8.

5 'CIS Presidents to Draw Up Regional Security Plan', *The News*, 11 October 2000, p. 21.

6 'No Threat to Central Asia from Afghanistan: Taliban,' *The News*, 20 September 2000, p. 4. Also see 'Afghan Government for Good Ties with Neighbours: Taliban.' *The News*, 16 October 2000, p. 10.

7 Ahsanur Rahman Khan, 'Taliban as an Element of the Evolving Geopolitics: Realities, Potential and Possibilities', *Focus On Regional Issues*, Institute Of Regional Studies, Islamabad, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, 2000, pp. 15-17.

8 'Taliban Team in New York to Lobby for UN Seat', *The News*, 22 September 2000, p. 10.

9 Ibid.

10 'Uzbeks Soften Stand Towards Taliban,' *The News*, 19 October 2000, p. 1.

11 The reasons can be attributed to the Turkmen's reliance on adat (tribal customs), President Niazov's strong curbing of Islamic parties and groups, his banning of foreign Islamic preachers, giving no quarter to asylum seekers for ethnic Afghan Turkmen and, above all, given the landlocked status of Turkmenistan, a compulsive need to export its gas and oil resources to the outside world. See Ahmad Rashid, 'Future of Islam in Central Asia - II', *The Nation*, Islamabad, 31 August 2000, p. 7.

12 Remarks made by Colonel Sultan Amir 'Imam,' Consul General, Herat, Afghanistan, Inter-Institutional Dialogue, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, Vol. 1, No. 2, 8 September 2000, p. 7.

13 'UN Warns of Famine Deaths in Afghanistan', *The News*, 10 October 2000, p. 2.

14 'UNHCR Calls for Aid to Speed Up Afghan's Return,' *The News*, 20 September 2000, p. 12.

15 It is estimated that nearly 150 to 300 casualties occur every month in Afghanistan as a result of land mines and unexploded ordnance. In the past 12 years, more than 30,000 individuals have fallen victim to mines in Afghanistan and their complete clearance may take seven to ten years. Arshad Sharif, 'Land Mines Claim 150 Lives Every Month in Afghanistan', *The News*, 3 October 2000, p. 3.

16 Peter Mardsen, *The Taliban: War, Religion and the New Order in Afghanistan*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

17 'UN Warns of Halting Aid to Afghanistan,' *The News*, 10 September 2000, p. 12.

18 Karl Inderfuth, US Assistant Secretary of State for Asian Affairs, in a statement cited in 'US Rules Out UN Seat for Taliban', *The News*, 9 October 2000, pp. 1, 8.

19 'Afghan Opposition Forms Front Against Taliban', *The News*, 7 October 2000, p. 10.

20 Nasim Zehra, 'After the Taliban Victories', *The News*, 7 October 2000, p. 6.

21 Lt. Gen. (retd.) Kamal Matinuddin, *The Taliban Phenomenon: Afghanistan 1994-1997*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 211.

22 Col. Imam, op. cit., p. 8.

23 Rashid, op. cit., p. 210.

24 Ibid., p. 212.

25 Col. (retd.) Mohammad Yahya Effendi, 'The Insurgency in Afghanistan', *Central Asia, Journal of Area Study Centre (Russia and Central Asia)*, University of Peshawar, Vol. 47, Winter 2000, p. 23.

26 Rashid, op. cit., p. 212.

27 Imam., op. cit., p. 8.

28 Matinuddin, op. cit., p. 217.

29 All official statements emanating from Russia and the Central Asian republics generally refer to this source of threat. See, e.g., *The News*, passim, July-November 2000.

30 See Maqsoodul Hasan Nuri, 'Peace in Afghanistan - II: Implications for the Region', *The Nation*, Islamabad, 21 June, 1999, p. 7.

31 It is estimated that the August-September fighting in the northern regions of Afghanistan uprooted about 150,000 people. Although the displaced people have not yet crossed the borders into Tajikistan, any intensified fighting in Badakhshah province could lead to an exodus of refugees to Tajikistan. The fall of Taloqan in early September forced 100,000 residents to flee from the place. See 'Tajikistan Ready to Receive Afghan Refugees: UNHCR', *The News*, 11 October 2000, p. 12.

32 'US to Increase Military Aid to Uzbekistan', *The News*, 28 September 2000, p. 12.

33 Imam, *Afghanistan*, op. cit., p. 8.

34 'Russia Threat to Region: Taliban', *The News*, 13 October 2000, p. 1.

35 Based on a talk by Nasim Zehra, delivered at the Area Study Centre, Quaid e Azam University, Islamabad, 4 October 2000.

36 Matinuddin, op. cit., pp. 212-27.

37 Ibid., p. 118.

38 'UN Moot Blames Taliban for Central Asian Unrest', *The News*, 20 October 2000, pp. 1,8.

39 There is no dearth of literature both domestic and foreign warning Pakistan of interfering in Afghanistan, which is harming the latter's long term national interests. As an example, see Kaiser Bengali, 'Afghanistan Must Make Us Shudder', *Political Economy*, *The News on Sunday*, 27 August 2000, p. 21; also see the editorial, 'Can We See the 1971 Scenario Developing in Our North-west?', *Frontier Post*, Peshawar, 15 October 2000, p. 6.

40 While the Afghan tradition of Pashtunwali (an unwritten code of law) states respect and protection to an outsider, in Afghan history this has spelt great suffering by inviting strong reprisals from outside powers. On this issue see Saleem Shah Kaka Khel, 'Asylum in Afghanistan', *The News*, 10 October 2000, p. 6.

41 By singling out Osama bin Laden and continuing to demonise him, the US tends to build up his charisma, exalt him to the status of a hero, and in turn, earn opprobrium of the Muslim world for 'animosity' against the Muslim world.

42 On the history of the Loya Jirga, read 'An Introduction into the History and Institutions of Afghan Traditional Loya Jirga', *Central Asia*, Vol. 47, Winter 2000, p. 131-142.

43 According to the UNHCR, the fighting has led to over 500 refugees daily crossing over to Pakistan from the northern and southern regions of Afghanistan. See, e.g., the editorial, 'Afghan Imbroglia: It Is Not Possible for Pakistan to Find New Resources to Play the Perfect Host', *The News*, 23 October 2000, p. 7.