

CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE AFGHAN SETTLEMENT: THE TRANSFORMATION OF AFGHANISTAN INTO A SEAT OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

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The long-drawn-out domestic conflict in Afghanistan has been remarkable for the existence over many years of wide regional and international aspects. The Afghan crisis has become an integral part of the global arch of instability from Kosovo and Macedonia through the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central, Southwest and South Asia up to The Philippines. However, in the second half of the 1990s, it rapidly started acquiring a new dramatic dimension.

In the country, a base for trans-border expansion of religious and political extremism formed, and this swiftly became surrounded with organisational, political and power structures. The virtual dissolution of the state, the sharp growth of inter-ethnic contradictions, the social, economic, spiritual and cultural degradation of Afghan society, exhausted by a twenty-plus year-old fratricidal war, contributed to Afghanistan's transformation into a base of international extremism and terrorism.

As their strategic goal, the Islamic radicals, i.e. al-Qaeda (The Basis) and the Taliban, based in the country proclaimed the forceful revamping of the region's map under religious slogans, establishing a 'caliphate' and later extending this process to other regions of the world, including Russia and other CIS states. Having invaded the major part of Afghanistan¹ and propagated the ideas of trans-border expansion, the leaders of al-Qaeda and the Taliban went on to extend their contacts with foreign extremist Islamic parties and to consolidate Afghan Islamic radical forces under a joint ideological and organisational command. In the first place, they did this through the establishment of a network of training centres, military bases and camps for the purpose of forming a terrorist 'international brigades'. The key and co-ordinating role in all this was played by the head of al-Qaeda and the World Front of Jihad (WFJ),² Osama bin Laden, and the Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar.

Having headed for military confrontation with the Northern Alliance – representing the Rabbani government, recognised by the world community and consisting for the most part of the Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks – the Taliban leaders ignored UN, Organisation of the Islamic Conference and individual states' initiatives aimed at forcing the Taliban into constructive talks with the Northern Alliance in order to stop the bloodshed and create a broadly representative multiethnic government. UN Security Council resolutions 1267 of 15 October 1999 and 1333 of 19 December 2000³ were not properly responded to either.

The terrorist acts in New York and Washington were committed on 11 September 2001. The USA placed the responsibility for them on al-Qaeda and demanded that the Taliban extradite al-Qaeda leaders.

On 7 October 2001, the USA together with Great Britain struck against the terrorists' facilities in Afghanistan, marking the beginning of the Enduring Freedom military operation against international terrorism. Many states took various parts in the operation.⁴ A world anti-terrorist coalition formed.

THE BONN AGREEMENT AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS

Against the background of this successfully developed anti-terrorist operation, which allowed the Northern Alliance to take over Kabul, a conference was held in Bonn from 27 November to 5 December. This inter-Afghan conference, held under the auspices of the UN, led to the signing of the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions. This document is a kind of an inter-Afghanistan compromise, reflecting in general the realities existing in the country. It lays a good foundation for a purposeful movement towards a general settlement of the Afghan problem and towards the political, social and economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan.

It is fair to mention the decisive contribution jointly made by Russia and the USA and that of Iran to the UN's intermediary efforts to facilitate an agreement. On 6 December, the UN Security Council in Resolution 1383 welcomed and approved the Bonn Agreements. The Bonn Agreement determined the scheme of actions aimed at forming the state authority structures in Afghanistan, providing for the creation of an interim (for six months) Afghan administration based on a multiethnic coalition. It assigned 17 of 28 ministerial positions to Northern Alliance representatives and the remaining portfolios, including that of Prime Minister, to supporters of the former Afghan king and other groups. The next stage is for the calling of a the traditional Afghan assembly – a Loya Jirgah – and this will be charged with forming a transitional authority to rule for 18 months and draft a new constitution. After 18 months, a regular Loya Jirgah will be called to create permanent state authorities and adopt a constitution.

The results of the Bonn Conference started the practical process of political settlement of the long-drawn-out intra-Afghan conflict. On 22 December 2001, in Kabul, a ceremony transferring power from the Rabbani government to the interim administration of Hamid Karzai took place.

The Bonn Agreement is the beginning of the end of the nearly 25-year-old bloody civil strife and the beginning of the Afghan people's move towards a national consensus and normal civil society. The restoration of Afghan statehood, revival of a peaceful, independent and neutral Afghanistan under a responsible national government and a predictable political regime should be the final point of this process.

At the same time, as a result of the civil war and its affects on social, political and economic life, the process of forming new central and local administrations is uneasy. The country looks like a conglomerate of regions existing separately from the central administration. Separatist ideas are strong among local military and political leaders, who frequently use inter-ethnic tensions for their own ends.

The situation is also complicated by the fact that the process of state building is going on against the background of the international coalition's on-going military action against the remaining terrorists and Taliban troops. There is no doubt that the extremists in Afghanistan have suffered heavy strikes against their military and subversive structures, but it is premature to say that their ideological and organisational potential has been eliminated.

A considerable number of medium-level leaders and gunmen have adapted to the new circumstances, reckoning on possible revenge under another political guise. In this regard, the most disturbing is the situation in the south and east of the country where the Talibs and Osama bin Laden's gunmen, dissipated as a result of the counter-terrorist operation, are

actively penetrating the leadership of local administrations.

The situation in the north and west of the country is not safe either. The problem lies in the strong personal ambitions of the local leadership, who could start confrontations with the central government under certain circumstances, including on some questions of state building.

The ongoing inter-ethnic tensions between the Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns, on which intertribal discord dividing the Pashtun ethnos itself overlaps, creates a huge potential for conflict that is very difficult to defuse.

The Afghans, it seems, are unable to succeed by themselves and need the international community's political and military contribution. However, given the Afghan character, the protracted stay of foreign troops in the country may become counterproductive. There is no doubt that extremists, demagogically exploiting slogans for the protection of Afghanistan's sovereignty, will try as much as possible to use this factor to incite hostility towards all foreigners.

The diversity of the modern Afghan political palette requires the anti-terrorist coalition to improve its own type and method of activity in Afghanistan so that the process of liquidating the terrorist infrastructure in the country will simultaneously strengthen Afghan statehood. Obviously, one should aim to transfer to the Afghans full responsibility for solving such issues as Afghanistan's national, central and local authorities strengthen.

It is high time that an additional impulse was given to the struggle against Afghanistan's central role in the production and trade of illegal drugs. The new political situation in the country creates the possibility of concentrating on eliminating the major factors contributing to Afghanistan's drug industry, not only with the help of the international and local authorities' administrative and law-enforcement mechanisms, but also by providing specific economic and social incentives. It is unlikely, however, that following this line will remove the need to strengthen the anti-drug cordon around Afghanistan, which for some time will be the main element in a comprehensive fight against drug trafficking.

The terrorist, extremist and drug threats in Afghanistan lead us to conclude that these dangerous challenges threatening the interests of the international community are not yet a thing of the past. Preventing their revival will require further comprehensive multilateral actions under the auspices of the UN.

UNITED INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS ARE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL SETTLEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Nowadays it has become quite common to say that the world changed radically after 11 September. Indeed, we all witnessed the international community's unprecedented rally against the terrorist threat. Among the most shining examples are Russian and US co-operation in the war against terrorism and Pakistan's crackdown on Islamic radicals. At the heart of these changes is the fact that the international community's common strategic interest in counteracting new threats and challenges became real and tangible due to the attacks of global terrorists and extremists; states abandoned their short-run tactical considerations.

Are these changes irreversible? It seems that the international community's policy in Afghanistan is one of the first tests of strength for these new international relations.

However, the established patterns of international relations in general and with respect to Afghanistan still play and will continue to play a negative role for a long time. From the nineteenth century rivalry between the Russian and British Empires in Central Asia, Afghanistan has been a small coin in geopolitical games. In the twentieth century this trend, which reached new levels during the Cold War and continued well after it, brought immeasurable suffering to the Afghan people and, in the end, turned the country in a terrorist and extremist hot-spot and a base of aggressive actions against neighbouring and other countries.

Over years of confrontation, regional and global players established strong ties with different political forces in Afghanistan, and these acted as their agents and represented their interests.

A revival of this pattern now would mean the failure of the project to turn Afghanistan into a peaceful neutral state that poses no threat to the international community. The difficulties on this road are so hard that they can only be overcome by coherent external efforts.

However, there are no grounds to think that the states participating in the present situation in Afghanistan will refuse political and economic dividends. Yet, one would expect external players to show some reserve while strengthening their positions in the country to proceed from the priority of common interests. There is a need for a code of conduct, possibly unofficial, the essence of which would be international co-operation instead of international competition.

Another important issue is ensuring effective mechanisms for co-ordinating the actions of the international community with respect to Afghanistan. Among such mechanisms, the leading role belongs to the UN Security Council, which since September last year has made several framework decisions on this issue. The situation certainly calls for the more active participation of the group of neighbours and friends of Afghanistan (the Six+Two Group). An important role also belongs to the Russian-American Working Group on counteracting threats emerging from Afghanistan and the analogous Russian-Indian institution. The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation, which has recently turned to the issue of anti-terrorist security, is also capable of making a positive contribution.

ECONOMIC AND HUMANITARIAN AID TO AFGHANISTAN

Without the post-war reconstruction of its national economy and social structures, it will be impossible to revive Afghanistan as a state at peace and in harmony with its neighbours and the international community and posing no threat to regional and global stability. Considering the complete devastation of the country, reconstruction will require massive economic and humanitarian aid from the international community. Though such aid alone does not guarantee success, it is indispensable.

The international community is ready to offer such aid. The Tokyo Donors' meeting, held 21 - 22 January this year, gathered representatives of 61 state and 21 international organisations. The declared value of contributions totalled \$4.5 billion, of which \$1.8 billion will be paid this year. The biggest contributors were Japan, the EU, the World Bank and Iran (each \$500 million), the US (\$296 million), Saudi Arabia (\$220 million), India and Pakistan (each \$100 million). The meeting agreed that the UN should co-ordinate the donor process. At the same time, the fact that a number of big donors, including Japan and the US, prefer to offer aid

through bilateral channels is rather alarming.

There is a definite need for a comprehensive concept that would define priorities for the international community in order to help Afghanistan to efficiently recover as soon as possible.

Russia expressed its readiness to contribute to the overall efforts to revive the Afghan economy, especially those branches that the Soviet Union had helped develop. The representatives of the Interim Authority asked Russia to consider participating in reconstructing infrastructure, energy and transport facilities, silos, etc. All these requests will be subject to careful assessment in order to implement them with the help of public and private Russian institutions. A list of projects that Russia could actively participate in is being drawn up.

The Russian Ministry of Emergencies together with some foreign non-governmental organisations has successfully finished the first stage of reconstruction of the Salang Tunnel, which is already open for traffic. When the necessary financial resources are accumulated, it is planned to complete the second stage to allow year-round traffic through Salang, which will boost economic activity in the country and improve Afghanistan's possibility of integrating into the global and regional transport infrastructure.

Russia will likely co-operate with Afghanistan in the fields of mine clearance, health care, education and culture. A Russian Ministry of Emergencies' mobile hospital operating in Kabul was presented to the people of Afghanistan. It is planned to provide necessary medical equipment and medicines to some Afghan hospitals.

At the same time, we should not ignore the possibility that the greater the international aid, the more acute the problem of avoiding the misuse of funds. It will not be easy. The major obstacles here are the tradition of corruption and self-enrichment of the highest ranks and the lack of a culture of democratic control. Another factor is the lack of government representation in the regions where real authority belongs to field commanders and tribal chiefs.

A separate problem is how to prevent the Afghans from developing a dependency mentality and to encourage them to take initiative and to use all their inner resources to make the most of external aid. The Afghan community abroad is a source of many specialists who could make a considerable contribution to enabling a stable economy and society.

All in all, rehabilitation of Afghanistan is an extremely difficult task. Every step of the way, there are numerous threats and dangers, any one of which is capable of disrupting the whole process. In this respect, an opinion on the prospects of an Afghan settlement in the influential journal *Eurasia Today* bears a whiff black humour: "The bleaker is the forecast, the better are the chances for it to prove true".

It seems it will be better to look at the issue from another angle. All the thinkable scenarios boil down to a simple alternative. Either the international community will preserve its existing unanimity of actions in respect to Afghanistan, thereby gradually turning the country into a peaceful and more prosperous state that poses no threat to international security, or temporary parochial interests and a struggle for spheres of influence will prevail, leaving the world to face threats emerging from Afghanistan once again.

1 The thesis that the Taliban gained control over more than 90 percent of the country, in our opinion, is not quite correct. The Taliban occupied large cities and roads leading to them. Numerous populations in the provinces, where there was no Taliban garrison, continued to live in their own way.

2 The majority of other Afghanistan-based religious extremist groups, including the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan, also sided with the WFJ. T. Uldashev, its leader, used to be Osama bin Laden's aide in the WFJ.

3 UN Security Council Resolution 1267 demanded that the Taliban hand over Osama bin Laden and dismantle the infrastructure for training international terrorists. It also banned international flights of the Afghan airline Ariana, and froze bank accounts and other assets of the Taliban movement, except those granting humanitarian aid. Resolution 1333 imposed a military embargo on the Taliban. It meant that all countries were to deny direct and indirect arms sales to the Taliban and consultations on military issues. All foreign assets of Osama bin Laden were frozen. All supplies of chemicals necessary to produce drugs were also prohibited.

4 President V. Putin's address of 24 September 2001 outlined the modalities of Russia's participation in these efforts and they are as follows:

- International co-operation between special services;
- Availability of Russian airspace for humanitarian flights to the areas of the anti-terrorist operation;
- Agreed common position with Russia's allies in Central Asia – “They share our view and do not exclude the possibility of making their fields available”;
- Readiness if necessary to participate in international search and rescue operations;
- Broader co-operation with the internationally recognised government of Afghanistan and additional support to its armed forces in the form of arms and military hardware supplies.