

US involvement in Afghanistan: Implications for the future

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The US interest in Central Asia in general and Afghanistan in particular is comparatively of recent origin. As the relationship between the governing elite in Afghanistan and the communist regime in the then USSR warmed up during the 1970s, it rang the alarm bells in US and since then till the recent discovery of oil in Central Asian republics, US policy towards Afghanistan was basically reactive and limited to the policy of containing USSR so that it did not spread its influence beyond Afghanistan towards the oil-rich gulf states. All throughout the 1980s the US tried its best to organize a 'Jihad' against the communists in Afghanistan. It deliberately raised a highly militant culture among the Afghan refugees and even went to the extent of making an international Islamic axis possible by recruiting mujahideen from all over the Muslim world. Once USSR pulled out, US left the scene and quietly allowed these forces to regroup under 'Taliban' and provide shelter to yet another Saudi mujahideen recruited during the years of Afghan Jihad, Osama Bin Laden, who had chosen to turn against US as the principal enemy of Islam. The post 9/11 attack on Afghanistan has in fact, the author argues, made the US policy (of supporting Jihad from whatever reasons at one point of time) stand on its head. The paper seeks to analyse the American policies in recent years critically.

[Editorial Board]

The long-term dynamics of US Foreign policy had not led it until the last few decades to pay any special attention to Central Asian countries beyond Iran and Pakistan. Indeed, even during the 1970s, the primary perception of the main threat to the 'free' Western supported or recognized countries was said to be due to the persistent strengthening of Soviet military forces in Asia, but this did not include Afghanistan at that time.

Ramon H. Myers in his well known Book on *A.U.S. Foreign Policy for Asia* has pointed out that during the 1970s, the US Concerns regarding Soviet moves in the Cold War game were centred on the Asia-Pacific and not the Central Asian Region. According to Myers, in those days, the USSR was adopting a low-key posture in the Indian Ocean Region.[1]

Until the 1970s too, Afghanistan, a relatively small landlocked country, had striven hard to maintain its policy of neutrality and a status of being non-aligned with any of the two power blocs between whom the Cold War was being waged. As a country, Afghanistan had started

developing its diplomatic skills to stay neutral during the Great Game between the then Big Powers— Russia and Great Britain— in the nineteenth century, trying to secure their influence in the Central Asian Region.

Even during the reign of King Abdur Rahman who used a centrally defined conception of Islam close to the *Sunni* orthodoxy of the Hanafi School to undermine divergent local traditions and unify Afghanistan in the late nineteenth century, the country stayed independent by promising not to allow either the British or the Russians to have a predominant position within Afghan territory.[2]

The strategy of having an even-handed relationship with all the notable Powers of the day was further extended in the 1920s and regular diplomatic ties between Afghanistan and the United States were established. The 1920s in Afghanistan were the days when King Amanullah who had ascended the throne with the help of young modernizers and promulgated the country's first formal constitution, along with a range of liberal reforms. While formal correspondence was being exchanged between USA and Afghanistan for the initiation of diplomatic relations, King Amanullah was overthrown in April 1929 by more conservative forces, who crowned Nadir Shah as King. However, the moderate forces reasserted themselves and Nadir Shah was succeeded by Zahir Shah whose regime was formally recognized by the Soviet Union in November 1933. In order to enhance its international status, Afghanistan joined the League of Nations September 1934.[3] The following example will demonstrate how Afghanistan had succeeded in establishing equal relations with other countries, and especially with the Big Powers. When USA had in its Draft agreement for establishing diplomatic relations wanted the “most favoured mutual treatment” clause to be included as Article IV, Afghanistan objected to Article IV since it had not included such a clause in its consular treaties with other countries like Russia, Great Britain and France. The US State Department concurred and the agreement to establish full diplomatic relations between Kabul and Washington was signed at Paris on 26 March 1936.

A US Consular mission was established in Kabul on 6th June, 1942. Still, Afghanistan pursued a policy of strict neutrality during the Second World War and Kabul did not align either with the Allied or the Axis Powers. The German embassy continued to function in Kabul throughout the Second World War although with a reduced staff at the insistence of Russia and Great Britain.

In the post Second World War period too, Afghanistan continued to enjoy good relations both with USA and the Soviet Union while remaining neutral and later joining the Non-Aligned Movement. In 1946, USA supported Afghanistan's admission as a member of the United Nations, which took place without any opposition from any country. On 5 June and 23 November 1948 USA and Afghanistan respectively promoted their chancelleries to the ambassador's level. An agreement for USA to provide technical assistance to Afghanistan was signed in 1951.

With the formation of the independent state of Pakistan in 1947 a new situation arose in Afghanistan's neighbourhood. Pakistan was opposed to the formation of an independent Pakhtoonistan, while Afghanistan supported it. Further, US military aid to Pakistan once it joined SEATO and CENTO compelled Afghanistan to take steps to get closer to the Soviet Union. Top Soviet leaders visited Kabul in December 1955 and it was followed by substantially increased Soviet economic as well as military aid to Afghanistan. In turn, USA sought to keep Afghanistan non-aligned by also increasing its aid by supplying foodgrains and developing the airport facilities in Kabul in 1956, costing 16 million US Dollars. In 1957, USA again provided aid worth 15 million US Dollars to Afghanistan, which, however, declined an offer to join the military alliances being formed by USA against the Soviet Union.

In June 1958, the Afghan Prime Minister Daud visited USA for a fortnight and received praise for his policy of neutrality. The US President Dwight D Eisenhower paid a short visit to Kabul in December 1959, and gave an assurance of continuing aid to Afghanistan. These pledges were repeated when the Afghan King Zahir Shah visited USA in 1963. In 1967 under a new agreement USA supplied large grain shipments and renewed the 1953 agreement concerning technical assistance to Afghanistan.[4]

Friendly relations between USA and Afghanistan continued after the monarchy was overthrown in a coup in 1973 led by the King's Cousin, Sardar Mohammad Daoud who also established the first Afghan Republic. The US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger paid an official visit to Afghanistan in November 1974 at the invitation of the Afghan government. US assistance in the fields of economic, technical and educational expansion was continued. Kissinger again visited Kabul in August 1976 and extended support to Afghanistan's policy of positive neutrality. This did not prevent the leaders of Afghanistan from infusing the country's fourth constitution in 1976 with strong socialist elements that further secularized the state, installed a one party regime and reformed the composition of the *Loya Jirga* or the traditional tribal assembly to include mainly the followers of the government.[5]

However Sardar Mohammad Daoud's policies to keep Afghanistan on a moderate course had created enemies among the Communists entrenched in the Afghanistan Army in the form of the *Khalq* and the *Parcham* factions backed by the Soviet authorities. The US strategy had all along suffered from the fact that on the one hand US officials like Joseph Foam had written about the presence of rich deposits of minerals like Chrome ore manganese, zinc, lead and silver and of the geo-political situation of Afghanistan which could supply vital routes for trade and the supply of gas and oil from Central Asia, a fact which became all the more true later on with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the desire of the independent Central Asian Republics to secure the shortest route for their pipelines to the Arabian sea; at the same time other official and more important US agencies at first argued that Afghanistan had little strategic value for USA. In 1953 a secret study by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that "Afghanistan is of little or no strategic importance to the United States. Its geographic location coupled with the realization by

Afghan leaders of Soviet capabilities, presages Soviet control of the country when the situation so dictates”[6]

Benefitting from the hold they had within the Afghan armed forces the Peoples’ Democratic Party of Afghanistan, carried out a Russian backed coup in April 1978. A Revolutionary Council with Noor Mohammed Taraki as Chairman was constituted and Afghanistan was declared a Democratic Republic. Soviet Russia was the first to recognize the new government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan which decreed a further set of liberal reforms overnight instituting land reforms, giving free education to all, and full freedom to women. The Khalq faction headed by Taraki and Amin had a predominant role in the new government. Kremlin signed a Treaty of Friendship with the Communist regime in Kabul on 5 December, 1978 in which the latter was assured of Moscow’s military help.

In a country of low literacy, feudal estates ruled by warlords, where the literate mainly consisted of the *Sunni* Muslim clergy who saw the liberation of women as entirely anti-Islamic and Communism as a denial of Allah, the Communist government had support mainly among the urban elites. A civil war started brewing in 1978 itself. The situation was further exacerbated by the infighting among the Communists. Hafizullah Amin replaced Noor Mohammed Taraki as Prime Minister of Afghanistan in March 1979. The emergence of the Babrak Karmal regime backed by Soviet troops pushed Afghanistan into the Russian Orbit after 27 December 1979 when the Soviet Army entered the country at the invitation of its government to help fight the Western backed rebels— the Mujahideens. Further, the refusal to accept US aid and the murder of the US ambassador Dubs in February 1979 completed Afghanistan’s rupture with USA. The Russian military ‘occupation’ as it was called by the dominant Western government and media was condemned and criticized by most governments especially the United States, the UN and the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC).

Afghanistan after the Soviet Intervention

By January 1980 media reports indicated that there were 80,000 to 100,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan. On 14 January 1980, just a few weeks after the Soviet invasion, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution (by a margin of 104 in favour, 18 against and 10 abstaining), which “strongly deplored the recent armed intervention in Afghanistan as inconsistent with the fundamental principles of the UN Charter, and calls for the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan.” This and several other resolutions of the UN General Assembly showed how most of the Third World Countries including the non-aligned ones disapproved of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan under the purview of the Brezhnev doctrine.

The Soviet military venture in Afghanistan was seen by USA in larger than life terms. According to Washington, it put the Soviets “within striking distance of the Indian Ocean and even the Persian Gulf”— an area of vital strategic and economic significance to the survival of Western Europe, the Far East and ultimately the United States. The Western liberal democracies, led by

the US which were very critical of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, joined hands with the Islamic groups called the Afghan Mujahideen to force the Soviets to withdraw from Afghanistan. According to Abdus Sattar, a former Pakistani Foreign Secretary, the US “raised covert allocations for supply of arms to the Mujahideens, from 250 million US Dollars in 1985, to 470 million US Dollars in 1986 and 630 million US Dollars in 1987. The American contribution was reportedly matched by Saudi Arabia. Pakistan calibrated the flow of assistance to the Mujahideen cautiously but it became bolder with time and experience.[7]

In order to put further pressure on the Soviet Union “the Carter Administration postponed the Senate vote on ratification of the SALT Treaty, blocked 2 billion US Dollars in grain sales to the USSR, prevented American athletes from participating in the 1980 Moscow Olympics, halted sales of advanced technology to the Soviet Union, increased military aid to Pakistan after earlier refusing to do so and accelerated contacts with the People’s Republic of China.”[8]

Whatever might have been the justification offered by the Soviet Union to send in its troops into Afghanistan, their presence did not succeed in counteracting the civil unrest aroused by the policies undertaken by the Soviet-backed Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) at first under the leadership of Nur Muhammad Taraki, and subsequently under Hafizullah Amin. The PDPA misjudged the level of political consciousness of the Afghan people and attempted to force reforms in Afghan society for which it was not ready. The PDPA regime initiated land reforms for which adequate preparations had not been undertaken and this resulted in the landed aristocracy as well as the peasants and a section of the clergy joining the opposition. The conservative sections of Afghan society were also incensed by the regime’s introduction of social reforms relating to women. The Taraki and Amin regime increasingly resorted to coercive methods to implement its policies alienating even the oppressed sections of the society. Hostile propaganda by Pakistan and Iran only aggravated the crisis. Starting in the second half of 1979, increasing numbers of Afghans began to flee the country and take refuge in Pakistan and Iran. These refugees were ready recruits for the ‘jihad’ that would be sponsored by the USA and Pakistan against Soviet backed communist regime in Kabul in the subsequent period.

The situation prevailing at that time around and within Afghanistan created conditions for external intervention led by the United States. In February 1979 the Shah of Iran was overthrown and replaced by the anti-US Islamist Khomeini regime. The US sent more naval ships to the area and created a Rapid Deployment Force(RDF) in order to intervene at short notice. The military dictatorship of General Zia-ul Haq in Pakistan also felt threatened by the economic and political reforms undertaken by the PDPA in Afghanistan. General Zia apprehended that if PDPA programmes would succeed in the neighbourhood, they would have widespread repercussions in Pakistan, particularly in the Baluch and Pakhtoon areas bordering Afghanistan. This was another reason why Pakistani government thought it strategically important to support the Mujahideen insurgency in Afghanistan. The coalescence of US and Pakistani interests produced unexpected benefits for Pakistan. It was now perceived as a frontline state in the fight against Soviet expansionism. USA gave Pakistan not only political importance sending many high officials to

visit Pakistan, but also a major package of military and economic assistance worth 7.22 billion dollars. The arms pipeline to Pakistan became bigger and bigger funneling weapons into the hands of the Afghan mujahideen.

The growing pressure of the mujahideen military campaign added to the concerns of the PDPA and led to fissures in its ranks. In December 1979 Hafizullah Amin was replaced by Babrak Karmal as leader of the PDPA. Later, in 1986, Najibullah took over from Babrak Karmal. These changes failed to expand the support base of the PDPA. Najibullah's efforts at national reconciliation came too late to stem the growing tide of Mujahideen resistance.

The Taliban takeover and its aftermath

Confronted with domestic civil war and widespread international criticism, the Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 1988. Contrary to expectations, the government of President Najibullah maintained effective power in the main urban centers, with significant external backing for four more years. The subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union weakened the Soviet link and once the Soviet support enjoyed by the Najibullah regime was completely withdrawn, 20,000 Mujahideen entered Kabul in 1992, and established an Islamic State headed by an Islamic Jihad Council, which consisted of representatives from the seven Pakistan-based opposition factions.

The first decrees of the new governing Council foreshadowed the draconian social and political legislation later enforced by the Taliban. The Council's Islamic laws included the banning of music, closing of theatres, the enforcement of compulsory prayer, veiling of women and denial of paid employment to them. It became obvious almost immediately that the proclamation of such 'Islamic' decrees could not hide for long the struggle for personal power which was taking place behind the scene. The Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani was challenged by his Prime Minister, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who wanted full authority for himself, resulting in serious infighting in Kabul and the disintegration of the new Islamic Republic.[9]

The internecine fighting was expected as those knocking at the gates of the capital belonged to different tribal groups armed during the Afghan jihad. Former allies had now become competitors for power in Kabul. Commander Ahmad Shah Masood (Jamiat-i-Islami) moved towards Kabul from the north. Engineer Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (Hizb-e-Islami) was advancing towards the same objective from the South. General Abdul Rashid Dostam (Jambish-e-Milli) flew 2000 of his well-trained Uzbeks into Kabul.[10] After a head on clash between all of them it was Dostum's and Masood's forces which controlled Kabul. The constant and bloody power struggle between various groups calling themselves Islamic created the vacuum, which Taliban later tried to fill, with active material and moral support of that Pakistani intelligence.

There are several interpretations of how the Taliban originated. One account says that their roots lie in the uprising in Kandahar by a group of young men, formerly students of religious schools

set up by the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam led by Maulana Fazlur Rahman in Pakistan for Afghan refugees in various parts of the North West Frontier Province. The students drove away the local Mujahideen boss and established a 'pure Islamic rule' led by one Mullah Umar. He was a veteran of the fighting against the Soviet army. It was only later the Pakistani intelligence agency the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) took over their organisation.

The second interpretation, which is closer to facts, is that the ISI of Pakistan mobilised the Taliban from the Madrassas or the Islamic Schools in Pakistan, trained and armed them and inducted them into the ranks of Taliban. The military skills of the Taliban, their training in the use of sophisticated weapons and fighting tactics were due to the training provided by the Pakistan army whose soldiers and commanders also sometimes fought along side the Taliban—to keep a watch on them.

The Taliban were overwhelmingly a Pakistan-sponsored Pashtun militia and once they captured Kabul, the Taliban representative in Islamabad was allowed to function as the head of the Afghanistan mission, after the eviction of Rabbani. It was not surprising that Pakistan extended official recognition to the Taliban government the very next day the Taliban entered Mazar-e-Sharif. They were also allowed to open consulates in Karachi, Quetta and Peshawar. Only Saudi Arabia and UAE recognized the Taliban government following Pakistan.

The Taliban government tried to unify the country behind its programme of radical Wahabi Islam, which, enforced a uniform dress code for men and made it mandatory for them to keep beards— thought of as being the Pathan tradition. Women were not allowed to go to school, were to go outside the home only accompanied by a close male relative, were not to hold any employment. All music was banned and television sets destroyed. According to the law of *Ijtehad* all pronouncements of Mullah Omar were to be treated as Islamic injunctions and law.

This life of pure Islam could not do away with sufferings that were in store for Afghans. The war-ravaged economy of Afghanistan was in ruins and outside help had suddenly dried up. Once the Taliban captured power the countries financing the Jihad stopped all emergency financial aid to Afghanistan for they thought that soon peace will prevail. But the civil war was far from over. Taliban was aware of the political implications of the economic downturns induced by continued civil war. In order to re-build Afghan economy the Taliban did try to end the civil war but with little success. At the external level, the Taliban government was yet to gain international recognition for ensuring international aid.

Pakistan left no stone unturned to help out Taliban both at internal and external levels. After the fall of Kabul to Taliban Pakistan had made relentless efforts on behalf of Taliban on the one hand to bring about some agreement between Taliban and Dostam who still controlled Mazaar-e-Sharif and Rabbani and Masood who controlled the Panjsher Valley and on the other, to gain international acceptance for Taliban including their representation in the United Nations.

Back in Afghanistan, the rigid and draconian laws enacted by the Taliban were not acceptable to many sections of the population— especially the Tajik and the Uzbek groups. Dostam was still in control of Mazaar-e-Sharif. The Uzbek militia and the Hizb-e-Wahdat of Karim Khalili also inflicted a devastating blow on the Taliban. Very soon both Abdullah Malik and Ahmed Shah Masood had driven the Taliban to the outskirts of Kabul. Far from being able to realize their version of an ideal Islamic Society, being in dire economic straits, the Taliban regime facilitated Opium cultivation and the narcotics trade, especially heroin exports to UK and USA both as a source of revenue and as a bargaining lever for external help.

The Taliban also provided sanctuary to hundreds of Arab ‘Afghans’ who were on the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI’s) list for attacking American establishments. The list got extended to those like Osama bin Laden and other members of the Al Qaida (means ‘the base’, founded by Osama) who were intending to attack USA.

Although USA had never accorded diplomatic recognition to the Taliban government, for some time, they had played around with the idea of engaging Taliban its own interests— to persuade them to end Opium cultivation and stop the narcotics trade in return for economic aid and support US plans to explore and transport oil and gas from Central Asia. With these aims in mind Robin Raphael then in charge of this region in the US State Department paid two visits to Kabul to meet the Taliban government functionaries. One of the US Oil Companies UNOCAL had even started planning for the construction of an oil pipeline through Afghanistan at a cost of about 8 billion dollars.

The US hopes were totally belied not only by the Taliban’s Islamic fundamentalist orientations within Afghanistan but also by the Taliban policy of harbouring Wahabite terrorists like Osama-bin-Laden who was planning attacks on US quietly from his base in Afghanistan. The hijacking of planes by terrorists and crashing them into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001 finally unearthed the links between the fundamentalist Taliban regime in Afghanistan and international Islamic terrorism. The Taliban refusal to honour US demands to hand over Osama, the mastermind of the Twin Tower attacks, revealed the links further.

The attack on World Trade Centre was followed not only by worldwide criticism and condemnation but also by the imposition of UN sanctions against Afghanistan. The sanctions imposed on Afghanistan in 1999 were further tightened in 2001 and all flights to and from Afghanistan were cancelled. The USA gave an ultimatum to hand over Osama Bin Laden and close down ‘terrorist’ camps in Afghanistan or face a military reprisal. It is interesting to note that the Taliban officially denied the existence of any terrorist camps in Afghanistan and pleaded on behalf of Osama Bin Laden that he had no resources to organize such an attack and called an Assembly or *Shura* of tribal elders to ask Osama to leave the country. Taliban also said later that Osama had reportedly fled 4 days before the start of the American air attacks.

The Taliban government even sent a formal condolence message to the US government and said that they were opposed to all forms of terrorism. The USA and its allies Britain, Australia, however, proceeded on the basis of reports prepared by their own intelligence agencies mainly based on intercepts of conversations on cell phones, to blame Al Qaida and the Taliban for giving them shelter. The Pentagon pushed ahead with its plan for bombing out the Taliban from Kabul. The government of Pakistan also supported the war efforts. With the deployment of few ground troops and the help of the Northern Alliance (consisting of forces of Dostam, Ahmed Shah Masood and the Shias), the US and allied forces occupied Kabul within a few months. Mullah Omar and Osama-bin-Laden fled but it is noteworthy that to this date they have not been found dead or alive despite huge rewards being offered by the US government.

In many ways, the war on terror in Afghanistan marked a turnaround for Pakistan's policy in Afghanistan, because until the US attack, it had done everything possible to install Taliban government in Kabul. But the most important thing that has missed the attention of many analysts worldwide is the policy turnaround by US in its approach towards Taliban. Till the September 11 incident, the US was adopting a policy of slow engagement with Taliban which, it had hoped, would bring about moderation in Taliban's approach and lead to its final recognition as the legitimate regime in Afghanistan.

The Bonn Agreement that followed the ouster of Taliban from Kabul installed an interim government headed by Hamid Karzai, charged with the task of convening a national assembly, a *Loya Jirga*, which would have the right to confirm his appointment, set up a commission to frame a new constitution and decide on a schedule to hold fresh elections. According to the Bonn Agreement all parties not believing in democracy—the Taliban and the Communist Party—were to be banned from participating in politics in Afghanistan. Afghans with a criminal record were also to be banned from Afghan politics. New parties were to be registered with the Ministry of Culture. Those who fought against the Soviet forces will be allowed to form a party only when the US\$ 22 billion received at that time was returned and the sources of their funding clarified. Among these parties are those of former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, the Jamat-i-Islami and that Northern Alliance which includes the interim Foreign Minister Abdullah, Interim Defence Minister Qasim Fahim and interior minister Yunus Qanooni, the Justice Minister.

South Asian perceptions of US intervention in Afghanistan

A significant feature of the situation as it has developed in South Asia is that governments in general have welcomed the 'War on Terror' and removal of the Taliban from power in Afghanistan and the successful conclusion of the Bonn agreement which paved the way for the restoration of constitutional democracy in Afghanistan.

India had from the outset when the Taliban took over Kabul in 1996 refused to recognize Taliban. Not only did it not accord diplomatic recognition to Taliban, it also allowed the existing Afghanistan embassy to continue to function as the representative of the government in-exile.

The then Indian External Affairs Minister Inder Kumar Gujral who later became the Prime Minister, in identical statements to both the Houses of Parliament said on November 25, 1996 that the Taliban were “obscurantists” with little respect for human rights and are not the legitimate government, even if they rule Kabul. His observation that they posed a threat to Indian security was proved right later on when an Indian Airlines plane was hijacked by Pakistan-based terrorists after it took off from Kathmandu. It was ultimately allowed to land in Kandahar and the Taliban backed the demand of the terrorists for the release of a Hizbul Mujahideen leader.

The Bharatiya Janata Party led government was quick to offer even military assistance, if the US government wanted it only a few days after the September 11 incident. This was in marked contrast to the overall neutrality displayed by India during the Gulf War in 1990, although India did vote for the UN resolution asking Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. When some US military aircrafts were allowed to refuel in India, during the Prime Ministership of Chandra Shekhar, this was done in absolute secrecy at the moment and later described as an “emergency measure”. At that time the Left parties and even the BJP had opposed the action of the Chandra Shekhar government. However, in the event of the US action against the Taliban almost all parties had no objections, except that some of the Left parties felt that the military action should have been taken by a UN peace-keeping force, and that no US military bases would be allowed on Indian soil.

For Pakistan, the attack on WTC and the subsequent global reaction against the Taliban turned its Afghanistan policy upside down. Perhaps, more than anything else, it was India’s quick positive response in offering help to USA against the Taliban, which compelled Pakistan to make a one hundred and eighty degrees turn from being the principal sponsor and advocate of Taliban to become USA’s staunchest ally in its War on Terror. USA was allowed the use of Pakistan’s airspace and ground bases. The rewards followed. Towards the end of September 2001, US announced a cash-grant of US \$ 50 million for Pakistan— the first such move since sanctions were imposed on it eleven years ago. Restrictions on sale of military materials were also lifted.

As regards the response of other countries in South Asia one can note two trends. All governments condemned the attack on WTC, accepted USA’s claim that it had been done by the Al Qaeda based in Afghanistan and did not oppose US military intervention. In Bangladesh, the caretaker government agreed to provide its airfields, airspace, seaports and refueling facilities to Anglo-US coalition forces.[11] In Sri Lanka, President Chandrika Kumaratunga condemned the attacks in USA and supported the war on terror. In Nepal, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba condemned the attack on the WTC and agreed to join USA’s global War on Terrorism.[12]

The Iranian President, Syed Mohammad Khatami too condemned the attacks and sympathized with the American people.[13] Iranian media was critical of Pakistan’s role in raising Al Qaeda and Taliban.[14] Iran favored a UN-led “anti-terror coalition” in which President Rafsanjani was willing to participate.[15] It viewed USA’s unilateral attack on Afghanistan as a proof of a long term plan to dominate different regions of the World. A survey in Iran showed that 47.6 percent

of Iranian people wanted neutrality, a UN supervised elections and an Afghan national government comprising all ethnic groups.[16]

The opposition to war came from Muslim organizations in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Iran and in Pakistan. In Iran, Seyed Atollah Mihajerani, the head of the International Centre for the Dialogue among Civilizations said that the whole course of events in Afghanistan was “a ploy to project Muslims as supporters of terrorism and disorder.”[17] One can see how different perceptions were at the government level and amongst sections of the people in Muslim countries as regards the US military intervention in Afghanistan.

Future Possibilities and Options

The Karzai-government has so far suffered two major political assassinations and an unsuccessful attempt on Karzai himself. Even after winning the Jirga’s mandate to be in power for 18 months, Karzai continues to be protected by US security personnel. His hold over his country is tenuous. Warlords are calling the shots in their respective strongholds, collecting revenue and providing safe passage thus keeping the Kabul administration weak and impoverished.

Much of the aid promised at the Tokyo conference is yet to materialise. The return of refugees— some 920, 000 from Pakistan, 75000 from Iran and 9000 from the Central Asian states— has only increased the responsibilities of the Afghan central government.[18] Even with a good harvest in 2001 of 3.56 million tonnes, it is a good 800,000 tones lower than the 1999 harvest. Four million Afghans face starvation and cannot be supplied food because of lack of cooperation from the warlords.[19]

The differences on the ground between various groups persist. The ruling Alliance favours liberal and secular values, whereas the Pakhtun mindset favours tribal culture and adherence to Islam. Tajiks in Kabul hold sway over eastern Afghanistan and enjoy the blessings of Russia, India and Tajikistan. Dostam’s Uzbeks at Mazar Sharif enjoy the patronage of USA, Russia, Turkey and Uzbekistan. The provinces of Herat, and Bamiyan are under Ismail Khan and Khalili respectively and they are supported by Iran. Unless different groups are absorbed in the evolving political system, unless there is consolidation of the national army and police administration, restoration of agriculture, and resumption of revenue collections by the state, mere holding of elections will not produce stability. Afghans will continue to suffer if the central administration in Kabul fails to be truly representative and lacks popular legitimacy.

It is too early to say whether the ability of USA to win support from Third World countries in its war on terror gives an unqualified sanction to USA to intervene in any country in the name of protecting human rights. In the case of Iraq at present the international community has been skeptical of US actions. The use of military power against any state or nation has to be preceded by international consensus in forums like UN.

The case of Afghanistan was different of course. The antediluvian nature of the Taliban regime did not even arouse the Afghan people to resist USA as the Vietnamese people had earlier done. The fall of Taliban was more welcome inside Afghanistan than anywhere else. It remains to be seen how actively US engages itself in the post-war reconstruction activities in Afghanistan.

Endnotes

1. Myers writes: "In addition to stationing 45 ground divisions on the Sino-Soviet border, the USSR has recently deployed surface combatants as well as ballistic missile submarines to its already large Pacific fleet, occupied former air bases at Da Nang and former naval facilities at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, garrisoned division size ground forces on the islands of Japan's Northern Territories and introduced SS-20 intermediate range missiles and long range bombers to the Asian-Pacific basin. This regional Soviet buildup of Soviet military might marks the beginning of a new strategic era. Soviet activities and maneuvers with increasing number of ships and aircraft have a direct effect on the US –USSR military balance of power, in the Western Pacific and worldwide, particularly in view of the reduction of US naval and air units for operations in the Indian Ocean." [Ramon H Myers ed., *A US Foreign Policy for Asia, the 1980s and Beyond*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, USA, 1982, p.2.]
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3. Mohammad Khalid Maarooof, *Afghanistan in World Politics*, Gian Publishing House, Delhi, 1987, pp. 29-31.
4. *Ibid*, p.37
5. *Ibid*, p. 65
6. American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents 1977-80, Quoted in Abdus Sattar, "Afghanistan: Jihad to Civil War", *Regional Studies*, 1996.
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8. Robert Mcnamara, *Out of the Cold: New thinking for American Foreign and Defence Policy in the 21st Century*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1990, pp. 82-83.
9. Claude Bruderlein, The Role of Islam in shaping the future of Afghanistan, *Peace Initiatives*, op.cit. p.50
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12. Report in *Rising Nepal* 13/09.2001, *POT*, *Nepal Series Vol. VII*, No.100 Oct. 11/20.
13. *Iran News*, 13/09/02, *POT Iran Series (IS)*, Vol. VI, No. 90, 12/10.01 p. 653
14. *Tehran Times*, 25/09/01, *POT (IS)*, Vol. VI No. 85, September 27, 2001, p. 619
15. Report in *Kahyan International*, 26 Oct. 2001, *POT Vol, VI No. 95 29/10/01* p.69
16. Report on "Joint statement by Rabbani, Patin and Rakhmanove", *Kahyan International*, 23/10/01, *POT op.cit*

17. Report in *Iran News*, 16/09/2001, POT Vol. VI, No. 91, October 16, 2001
18. Report from UNHCR, *UN Newsletter Vol. 57, No. 25*, 22-28 June 2002 p.1
19. Mahendra Ved, "Afghanistan in the Changing context", *Bulletin News from Non-aligned World*, Vol.24, No.5, 26, November, 2002, Published by International Institute of Non-Aligned studies, A-2/59 Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi- 110 029