

# What went wrong in Afghanistan?

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Afghanistan ✓

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the Nation

*The king is killed in his throne  
and so is the lion in its lair  
the men are still wild to fight  
who will conquer the unruly Afghans*  
(Translated from a Pushto couplet  
in 1892)

The situation in Afghanistan poses a leading security concern for Pakistan internally as well as for the regional peace. The appointment of Hamid Karzai in the wake of Bonn Conference in December 2001 with the huge western aid flow despite rapid ongoing development has not made Afghanistan politically stable so far. Those in power in Afghanistan with the exception of Karzai, a Pathan, were/are not friendly to Pakistan and its interests.

Afghanistan was a nation-state whose society was based on traditional values. The boundaries of strict rule was limited to few cities and rest of the country was mostly run on the tribal basis and a strict control of the affairs by Kabul was always abhorred. However, its tribal unruly structure did not pose any threat to the internal and regional tranquillity.

In Afghanistan, Zahir Shah (1923-) stepped into power under a tutelage after Nadir Shah was stabbed to death in a football stadium in 1939. Zahir Shah ruled the country until he was deposed by a palace coup in 1973 at the hands of his cousin, Mohammad Daoud.

Zahir Shah was a shrewd ruler who believed in implementation of his rule by not disturbing the traditional character of Afghan society. He showed more favours to the tribal leaders representing the Pashto speaking areas, but overall he ignored developments and reforms. This reflects on him as during his 34 years of rule he could promote many social and economic developments in the interior.

The only commendable political development he made was the drafting of 1964 Constitution and election of *Loya Jirga* (the Grand Assembly). The election of the Grand Assembly was designed to win the loyalties of the tribal leaders and keep them in liaison with the central government. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) emerged during the period, al-

fighting combatants, ammunition and light guns landed in Afghanistan.

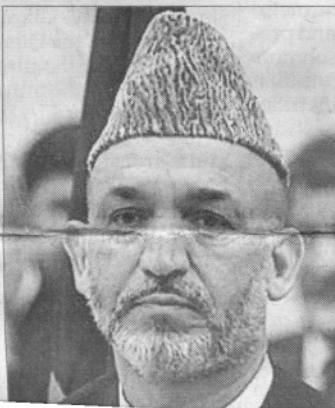
Revolutions and counterrevolutions do not happen in isolation. They are supported, abetted and intervened into, in many cases, by super and regional powers. It went true in the case of Afghanistan. On the other hand, the United States, having recognised the criticality of the "low intensity conflict" in Afghanistan, they started supporting Afghan counter-revolutionaries, now branded *Mujaheedin*, fighting for *Jihad*, the holy war.

The concept of *Jihad* is taken seriously in Afghanistan. The low intensity conflict, now many Taliban are familiar with and trained for, began as a term in the mountainous terrain of Afghanistan. It mostly included different varieties of limited conventional wars, particularly guerrilla fighting.

Pakistan was dragged into the conflict, a price it has been paying ultimately. Pakistan could have avoided its involvement into the game provided there had been a stable political government in Islamabad. The "ruler type" Praetorian role Zia ul Haq regime had in Afghanistan found a chance to garner western countries' support for its rule, politically and financially. Afghanistan became a pawn on the super-power chess game. What went on during the years (1979-1988) needs less elaboration but more understanding.

The Geneva Accord which led to the pullout of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan followed a series of power-struggle episodes between the rival groups. The post Geneva Accord scenario was followed by bitter chaos and unruliness which plunged Afghanistan into civil war.

The rise of Taliban in 1994/95 changed the balance of power between the major rival groups. Before 1994 Taliban did not have any political or strategic significance. They rose from Kandahar and by 1997 had captured 95 percent of the country. The emergence of Taliban served Pakistani purpose from the security point of view, a prelude to Pakistan's moral and logistic support for Taliban, to



or the tribal leaders and keep them in liaison with the central government. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) emerged during the period, although its roots came from the first radical group in Afghanistan

*Wish Zelmeh* (the awakening youth).

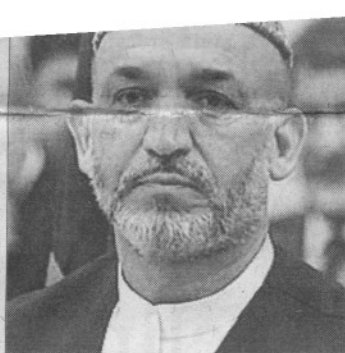
An apparent development of highways network linking different areas of Afghanistan was due to the Soviets and Americans. The Kandahar-Kabul highway, including the Kandahar airport was built by the Americans in early 1960s. The Jalalabad (beginning from Torkham) to Kabul, Kabul to Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif was built by the Soviets in late 1960s and 1970s. The Soviets made a number of developments under the five year rule of President Daoud (1973-77), including the construction of Helmand Project.

President Daoud compared to Zahir Shah believed in more political and economic development. He allowed political participation and tried to restructure Afghan foreign policy by burying hatchets with the neighbours, Iran and Pakistan. He believed in the limitation of the growing Soviet influence. He sensed the growing influence of radicals backed by the Soviets in Afghanistan when he turned Afghanistan into a one-party state, National Revolution Party.

The 1978 coup brought PDPA, divided into two factions *Parcham* (flag) and *Khalq* (people), into power. The 1978 takeover was named as Saur Revolution by the party (Saur/April). They, less entrenched political and ideologically in public, nonetheless, believed in broader mobilization of Afghan society on progressive lines. For this purpose they introduced rapidly a number of reforms to envisage social, economic and cultural changes in society.

The reforms led to resistance as the government moved for their implementation. The reforms could have been successful and beneficial in the long run if the implementation had been evolutionary and tactful. The resistance sparked tribal and religious sentiments, but especially economic. As the famous Afghan anthropologist Hasan Kakar confirmed, the changes made a considerable portion of the population wild and resistant to the government.

Those familiar with Afghan affairs know that things again would not have turned so vulnerable if there had been no external involvement. The Soviet being a bloc power and over-confident of its success by mighty deployment in the mountainous terrain to help the government, its ally, against the tribal resistance, on December 27, 1979, started the deployment under the command of General Ivan G. Pavlovskiy and General Yapishev (both commanded Soviets actions in Czechoslovakia and Hungary). Each day 75 to 120 flights carrying



1997 had captured 95 percent of the country. The emergence of Taliban served Pakistani purpose from the security point of view, a prelude to Pakistan's moral and logistic support for Taliban, to bring peace and security in Afghanistan. What-

ever differences one may have with Taliban, an undeniable fact is that they brought law and order and stability to Afghanistan. And also they took effective measures, a hard nut to crack, to control poppy cultivation.

The 9/11 reversed the Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan. As Thierry, Meyssan writes in her recently published book *9/11: A Big Lie*, the immediate repercussion was the revenge of Afghanistan. In the game of power politics where dominant power defines the rules of the international system and makes its repercussions for small powers in redefining its foreign policy, rules were set for Pakistan.

It once again assumed the position of a frontline state; Afghanistan became the target of a new US hot war in Asia. The major challenge for Pakistan after September 11 was the predicament of war against terrorism. In the medium term after the military operation, the US agenda became more complicated bringing new challenges. Pakistan should spin on its head, discard the Taliban, discard Islamic Jihad, discard Islamic fundamentalists, and become an accomplice in American military intervention in Afghanistan or else face the consequences.

President Bush had made it clear that those who failed to join hands with them against terrorism were then against them. After 9/11 it had become incumbent upon President Musharraf to agree to "Full Cooperation" in the global war on terror as it was essential to the success of the US coalition building against terrorism. The cooperation at the cost of internal security and chaos is still continuing.

The Bonn Conference in December 2001 led the appointment of Hamid Karzai as the interim President of Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai, being a Pathan and comparatively sympathetic to Pakistan is surrounded by men from Northern alliance such as Abdullah Abdullah who are staunch opponents of Pakistan. The stationing of American led foreign troops with the huge flow of aid for the future development of Afghanistan is still without a stable and peaceful Afghanistan.

The security concerns for Pakistan have however exceeded during the last two years internally. Afghanistan during the last twenty two years served as the worst example of superpowers' rivalry and a nursery for low intensity conflict guerrilla warfare.

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