

DISCUSSIONS ON CURRENT SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES*

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Resurgence of Taliban

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Taliban, a movement of Afghan Pashtuns having cross-border affiliations, ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. After September, 2001 the US military threw them out of power which reflected the decline of Taliban as a political and military power. Nevertheless, the existing politico-military scenario of Afghanistan establishes that Taliban have again gained the strength and posed a major challenge to the US and its coalition forces. Various national and trans-national factors and forces, e.g., poppy cultivation, Pakistani military, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and madrasas, weak and flawed US policies, illegal arms supply and weak Afghan government, have played a critical role in its resurgence.

Keywords: Taliban, resurgence, movement, poppy cultivation, Afghanistan

Introduction

The Taliban...has the upper hand in the fight against Pakistani, Afghan and NATO forces.

-Asif Ali Zardari (2008)

Since September 11, 2001, Afghanistan has received constant global attention. The destruction of World Trade Centre and Pentagon – economic and security centers – made Afghanistan a matter of grave concern for the United States of America (USA). In late nineties, Afghanistan was the victim of ‘donor fatigue’ (Sharma, 2008: 3). It was forgotten and neglected by the world. The United Nations made constant efforts to bring the derailed state back on the track, but went in vein. Taliban created a complete lawlessness, disorder and anarchy. Ideals of ‘democracy’ and ‘human

rights’ were empty, hollow and meaningless. Nonetheless, circumstances changed vividly. The US launched ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ with the help of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to root out the Taliban regime, to democratize the state and, to have a long-term international effort to provide economic assistance for humanitarian relief and reconstruction of the country (Sharma, 2008: 3). The US led NATO forces crushed Taliban and initiated the UN sponsored political process aimed at unifying Afghanistan. A legitimate central government was formed on November 27, 2001, with Hamid Karzai as the Head of the Afghanistan Interim Authority (AIA) (Sharma, 2008: 2-3). Then, Karzai became the President of a democratically elected government. The formation of democratic government led to peace and stability in the

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country. Nonetheless, Taliban have resurged since 2006 in the most areas of Afghanistan while regularly attacking the Government of Afghanistan, allied NATO forces participating in Operation Enduring Freedom, and NATO led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and creating lawlessness, disturbance, insecurity and instability. The present article analyses the historical background of Taliban, and is, primarily, focused on its resurgence since 2006. It also examines the reasons behind its resurgence.

History of Taliban

The term '*Taliban*' has been derived from an Arabic word '*Talib*' which means 'one who is seeking'. Generally, '*Talib*' refers to 'someone who is seeking religious knowledge' or 'a religious student'. In Pashto language, '*Taliban*' also refers to 'student' (Mishra, 2008a: 28). Taliban are a Sunni Islamist and Pashtun movement that ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. They were removed from power by cooperative military efforts between The US led NATO forces and Northern Alliance. Taliban, currently, based in Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan (FATA), are engaged in guerrilla war against the Government of Afghanistan and allied NATO forces. They are making efforts to expand their operations and influence in Pakistan.

The Taliban movement which was headed by Mullah Mohammed Omar encompasses overwhelming majority of ethnic Pushtuns from Southern Afghanistan and Western Pakistan, along with a small number of volunteers from Islamic countries or regions in North Africa, Middle East and the former Soviet Union. Its emergence as a military and political power began in 1978. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan inspired an American-led-counter-interventionist strategy which was implemented through Pakistan in support of the Afghan Islamic resistance forces commonly known as 'Mujahideen'. The Soviets

were forced to leave Afghanistan by the end of 1980s. Their supported regime also collapsed in Kabul by the end of April 1992 (Katzman, 2008: 4). The US, consequently, ended its involvement in Afghanistan with no due consideration to the post-communist management of the Afghan conflict. Afghanistan was left very much in 'tatters', lacking 'viable' political, administrative and security structures (Saikal, 2002: 38). The Mujahideen Islamic Government that took over Kabul could not rapidly consolidate power. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan capitalized on its close friendship with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to generate a fresh and extremist Islamic fighting force. That force was the Taliban, which burst onto the Afghan scene with human, military and logistic support of Pakistan and with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) financial backing. These states were traditionally friendly towards Pakistan and wanted some anti-Iranian lobby in Afghanistan. The CIA, and for that matter, the US government supported these developments in an apparent attempt to let Pakistan fill the power vacuum generated in post-communist Afghanistan. The US leadership viewed Taliban as beneficial to its interests. Militia's anti-Iranian character and its ability to secure a direct corridor through Afghanistan into the newly independent and resource rich Muslim republics appeared appealing (Saikal, 2002: 38-39).

The Taliban movement owed its emergence to the misrule of the Afghan Mujahideen. Taliban captured Herat in August, 1995 and Kabul in September, 1996. They controlled 90 percent of Afghan territory by the end of 1997 and pushed hard to capture the rest (Yusufzai, 2002: 105 and; Katzman, 2008: 4). The Taliban movement was a reaction to the cruelties and corruption of the Mujahideen commanders. They were forced to take the decision of ruling Afghanistan by moral degradation and loot activities of Mujahideens

that had become unbearable. The Afghans were fed up with the Mujahideens. They were ready to overthrow them and welcome Taliban (Yusufzai, 2002: 102-103). An unstable and weak political condition and misrule by the Mujahideens, therefore, provided an opportunity to Taliban to emerge as the supreme power of Afghanistan and rule the country.

Taliban regime, also known as '*Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan*', gained diplomatic recognition from only three states, i.e. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Under the leadership of Mullah Mohammed Omar and Mullah Obaidullah Akhund it established its close relationship with Al Qaeda, Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin, Islamic Emirate of Waziristan and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. They, initially, enjoyed enormous good will from the Afghans weary of corruption, brutality and incessant fighting of Mujahideen warlords. They opposed tribal and feudal structures and eliminated the traditional tribal and feudal leaders from the leadership roles. Since they were reluctant to share power and their ranks were overwhelmingly Pashtuns, their rule meant ethnic Pashtuns controlled multi-ethnic Afghanistan where Pashtuns made up only 42 percent of the total population (Katzman, 2008: 3). Taliban regime replaced all the senior Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara bureaucrats at national level with the Pashtuns without considering their qualifications. In local units of government like city councils of Kabul and Herat, Taliban loyalists dominated instead of locals even though the Pashto-speaking Taliban could not communicate with local Persian-speaking Afghans. Absence of local representation in the urban administration made Taliban appear as an 'occupational force'. Like other Deobandis and Wahhabis, Taliban strongly opposed the Shia branch of Islam and declared Hazaras as non-Muslims. They established a new form of Islamic radicalism that spread beyond

the borders of Afghanistan, mostly to Pakistan. Taliban were adverse to debate on doctrine with other Muslims (Encyclopedia, 2008: NP). They did not allow even Muslim reporters to question their edicts or to discuss interpretations of the Qur'an. They did not hold elections by arguing that the *Shariat* does not allow politics and political parties. They provided food, clothes, shoes and weapons instead of salaries to officials or soldiers. Jihad was declared as their right and, wished to recreate the time of the Prophet. Shariat law was interpreted to ban a variety of activities hitherto lawful in Afghanistan (Katzman, 2008: 4-5). One Taliban list of prohibitions included employment and education of women, pork, pig oil, anything made from human hair, satellite dishes, cinematography and equipment that produced the joy of music, pool tables, chess, masks, alcohol, tapes, computers, television, videos, anything that propagated sex and was full of music, wine, lobster, nail polish, firecrackers, statues, sewing catalogs, pictures and Christmas cards (Encyclopedia, 2008: NP). Besides, keeping of pigeons, flying kites, western hairstyles and gambling were also prohibited. Men were required to have a beard extending farther than a fist clamped at the base of the chin. They had to wear their head hair short. These edicts were also implemented by Taliban style groups in the Pashtun belt of Pakistan and, to some extent, in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) (Encyclopedia, 2008: NP).

Most of the states in the world including Russia, Iran, India, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and later, the US opposed the Taliban and supported its rival front which is known as 'the Northern Alliance'. The beginning of the end of the Taliban regime started when it shook hands with Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda and allowed to perform its activities freely in Afghanistan. Osama Bin Laden started his activities against the United States. Earlier, the

US was supporter of Taliban. Reason being, Washington leadership hoped that Taliban would serve as a 'force' to restore order in Afghanistan after the long period of division into corrupt and lawless warlord fiefdoms. Therefore, the US did not react when Taliban captured Herat in 1995 and expelled thousands of girls from schools. Nevertheless, the US hopes faded as it began to be engaged in warlords practices of rocketing unarmed innocent civilians targeting ethnic groups particularly Hazaras and restricting the rights of women. Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of States in 1997, began to distance the US from the Taliban. An American based Unocal Oil Company also withdrew from a deal with the Taliban government concerning an oil pipeline in 1998 (Encyclopedia, 2008: NP). In 1998, Taliban's relations with foreign groups became much more acrimonious. Its forces killed several thousands of civilians after attacking the city of *Mazar-e-Sharif*. Ten Iranian diplomats and intelligence officers were also killed in the Iranian consulate. The Government of Iran was incensed and a full blown regional crisis ensued with Iran mobilizing 200,000 regular troops, though war was averted. A day before capture of *Mazar-e-Sharif* Osama bin Laden's associates bombed two US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (Katzman, 2008: 5). The US responded by launching cruise missiles attacks on the suspected terrorist camps in Afghanistan killing over 20 persons. Though, the US failed to kill Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders, Mullah Omar condemned the US missile attack and the US President Bill Clinton. Saudi Arabia expelled the Taliban envoy in Saudi Arabia in protest over the Taliban's refusal to hand over Laden and after Mullah Omar allegedly insulted the Saudi Royal family (Encyclopedia, 2008: NP). The US National Security Council also unanimously voted to ban commercial aircrafts to and from Afghanistan and freeze its bank accounts worldwide. Taliban, further, isolated in

March 2001 with the destruction of archeological treasures, the giant Buddha statues of 1500 years old in Bamiyan (Katzman, 2008: 4). Al-Qaeda attack on the USA on September 11, 2001 destroyed the World Trade Centre and damaged a part of Pentagon, respectively in New York and Washington, D.C. In these attacks, the Twin Towers were completely destroyed. The whole world was stunned with this terrorist act of Al-Qaeda. Hence responding to these attacks, the US leadership declared 'the war against terrorism' and delivered an ultimatum to the Taliban to extradite all Al Qaeda leaders to the US, to release all the imprisoned foreign nationals, to close all terrorist training camps, to hand over all terrorists and their supporters to appropriate authorities and to give full access to the United States to terrorist camps for inspection. Taliban decided not to extradite Osama bin Laden without evidence. The UAE and Saudi Arabia withdrew recognition of Taliban as the legal government of Afghanistan. The US along with its allies in NATO began its military pursuit 'Operation Enduring Freedom' against Taliban on October 7, 2001 and bombed Taliban and Al-Qaeda related camps (Mishra, 2006: 29). The objective of military operation was to remove Taliban from power because of the Taliban refusal to the September 11 attacks, and disrupt the use of Afghanistan as terrorist base of operation. In the US air attacks hundreds of Mujahideens and thousands of civilians were killed which, ultimately, led to the end of the Taliban regime. Taliban gave up their last stronghold of Kandahar in early December, 2001 and dispersed in various directions.

Resurgence of Taliban

The US security forces were raining missiles and bombs on Iraq. But on the other hand, the state of affairs was taking a worse shape in Afghanistan. Taliban was regaining the strength (Cherian, 2003: 56). The Bush administration

had promised a 'New Afghanistan' after the removal of Taliban regime. But evidently the writ of the US supported government hardly runs beyond Kabul. It has been seven years since the end of Taliban regime in Afghanistan. But the picture has not changed much. After the fall of Taliban, between 2002 and 2005, the US and its allied forces fought relatively low levels of Taliban insurgent violence. The United States and Afghan troops conducted 'Operation Mountain Viper' in August, 2003, 'Operation Avalanche' in December, 2003, 'Operation Mountain Storm' in March-July, 2004, 'Operation Lightning Freedom' in December, 2004-February, 2005 and 'Operation Pil' in October, 2005 (Katzman, 2008: 21). After these operations it was assumed that Taliban movement had ended.

The assumptions proved false. Taliban gained resurgence in most of the tribal areas. The incidents of 'hit and run' and suicidal attacks of Taliban have increased on a large scale. Only in the beginning of year 2006, 2300 people had died in Afghanistan. A total of 147 military personnel had died in 2006. Apart from this, till the first week of September, 2006 472 NATO and US soldiers were killed and 972 were injured (Anand, 2006: 9). Increasing number of Afghanistan National Army and Afghan Police personnel were also killed in Taliban attacks. Between 2003 and 2006 approximately 23 acts of suicide attack were held in Afghanistan (Roy, 2006:17). In May, 2006 a surge of Taliban attacks throughout Afghanistan left over 100 people dead. A number of suicidal bombings also took place during May 2006 in Ghazni and Herat (Roy, 2006:18 and; Anand, 2006: 9-17). The US and its allied forces had only temporary successes in the major anti-Taliban military operations such as Operation Mountain Lion, Operation Mountain Thrust, Operation Medusa and Operation Silicon (Katzman, 2008: 21-22).

The security condition in Afghanistan has deteriorated since 2006. Taliban unsuccessfully targeted the US Ambassador in central Unruzgan on January 5, 2006, killed a Canadian diplomat on January 15, 2006 in Kandhar, killed 21 Afghan civilians at Spin Boldak in the Southern Kandhar province and also attacked the vehicle of Afghan National Army on January 16, 2006, killing four soldiers and a civilian in Kandhar (Roy, 2006: 17). Taliban have administrative and operational control over certain areas in Southern and Eastern Afghanistan. Its volunteers carried out its attacks from these areas. The most recent evidence of Taliban resurgence are the attacks of Taliban and its allies on a jail in Kandhar and Indian embassy in Kabul. On July 7, 2008, suicidal attackers tried to ram an explosive-laden vehicle through the gates of the Indian embassy in Kabul. After the blast there were 58 people killed and 170 were injured. The two Indian diplomats, the military attache, Brigadier Ravi Dutt Mehra, and political counselor, V. Venkateswara Rao, were also killed in this attack (Moss, 2008a :27 and; Cherian, 2008:131-132). It was the deadliest attack in Afghanistan since a suicide bomber killed more than 100 people who were watching a dogfight contest in Kandhar province in February 2008. Two Indian security persons and six Afghan security personnel also died in this attack. The majority of the Afghan civilians who were killed had been queuing up for the Indian visas (Cherian, 2008: 131-132). In another suicide attack, on July 13, 2008, the Taliban attacked a highly fortified Jail in the Southern Afghan city of Kandhar. One suicide bomber drove in an explosive-laden water tanker through the main gate of Sarkoza prison while another struck the rear of the Jail compound wall. This was immediately followed by an attack on the prison, killing 15 security guards, by 30 motorcycle borne guerillas. In this incident more than a thousand prisoners, including hard-core Taliban fighters, escaped (Cherian, 2008: 58).

To sum up, since 2006, as the incidents indicate, Taliban has gained revival in most parts of Afghanistan and, has emerged as a major source of disturbance, instability and violence.

Factors Behind The Resurgence

Despite all the efforts of the US to nip the Taliban from Afghanistan, it is again gaining hold on Afghanistan. Recent attacks that killed thousands of people have proved its resurgence which is a severe 'headache' for the US and NATO forces. It is also an alarming sign for India. Taliban has resurged mostly in Southern Afghanistan. There are many actors and factors, for example, cultivation of poppy crop, Pakistani military and ISI, supply of illegal arms, Pakistani Madrasas, weak and flawed policy of the United States and lack of strong political authority in Afghanistan which have contributed to its resurgence.

Poppy Cultivation:

Poppy cultivation is the main reason behind resurgence of Taliban. Afghanistan which produces 93 percent of the world's opium has a phenomenal growth in poppy production since 2001. The crop is as popular as ever in the entire Southern Afghanistan including Helmand province. And 50 percent of the country's opium production is credited to Helmand, the stronghold of the Taliban (Nooruzzaman, 2008: 10). The United Nations Office of Crime (UNODC) in the *'Afghan Opium Survey, 2006'* discloses that Afghanistan has registered 'highest production level ever recorded in Afghanistan' accounting for almost 92 percent up from 87 percent in 2005 of the world's total illicit opium production. The area under poppy cultivation increased from 104,000 hectares in 2005 to 165,000 hectares in 2006, an increase by 59 percent. Similarly, the potential opium production has increased by 49 percent from 4100 metric tons to 6,100

metric tons (Chandra, 2008: 33-34). These facts establish that there has been a great rise in opium cultivation which is fueling Taliban Movement in Afghanistan. A large part of the income generated through poppy cultivation goes to the extremist movement. The extremists and private traders provide credit to the poppy farmers on easy terms and also help them in marketing their produce. Russian smugglers play a very crucial role in promoting the 'destructive cause' of the Taliban. These smugglers supply the Taliban activists, the arms and ammunition they need in exchange for opium (Nooruzzaman, 2008: 10). Hence opium cultivation provides financial back up for Taliban. The price of heroin and opium is very high on international market. A kilogram of the best Afghan heroin is worth 600 pounds in Afghanistan. It is worth twice as much at the bazaar in Tajikistan (Starkey, 2008: 11). But rather than take cash the Mujahideen take weapon parts because they double their value in Afghanistan. The drugs come mostly from Helmand where most of British troops are based. The opium grown there is turned into heroin in factories inside Afghanistan, sold into Tajikistan and smuggled into Europe. The guns are broken down into parts, smuggled back into Afghanistan and delivered to the Taliban. One kilogram of heroin can buy about 30 AK-47 assault rifles at the bazaar (Starkey, 2008: 11).

The guns go straight to the Taliban frontline. The weapons on sale include machine guns, sniper rifles and anti-aircraft weapons. The trade is mostly done at a bazaar near old Afghan-Soviet border, deep in Tajikistan's desert. The bazaar exists specifically to trade Afghan drugs for Russian guns. The Russian gangsters smuggle drugs into Britain and buy cheap heroin from Afghanistan and exchange it for guns. Smugglers never sell drugs for money. In fact, they exchange them for arms and ammunition (Starkey, 2008: 11).

The United Nations Rapid Survey, 2008, divulges that Afghanistan produced 8,200 tons of opium in 2007. During the Najibullah regime in the 1980s, the average opium production was only around 300 tons annually (Bhattacharji, 2008: 62). Although opium production has increased in recent years and the Afghan government has also failed in keeping check on opium cultivation. The government has also failed in capturing the opium from the country. In 2007 Iran seized 2,31,352 kilograms of Afghan opium while Afghanistan could seize only 90,990 kilograms. Afghanistan seized 9,079 kilograms of heroin while Pakistan seized 24,341 kilograms, Iran 12,493 kilograms and China 9,085 kilograms. Thus Afghanistan which produces 90 percent of the world's opium and heroin seizes only 27 percent of the opium and 10 percent of the heroin (Bhattacharji, 2008: 61-62).

In brief, the cultivation of poppy and opium crops has played a significant role in the resurgence of Taliban. It has become the main financial source for Taliban militia against the Coalition forces in Afghanistan.

Pak Military and ISI:

Pakistan's military and the Inter-Services-Intelligence (ISI) are playing a very crucial role in the resurgence of Taliban. They are providing them human, military and financial support. In other words, besides its emergence Pakistan is also supporting Taliban's resurgence. The recent attack on Indian embassy in Kabul on July 7, 2008 revealed the relations between Taliban and ISI. The US intelligence officials have concluded that elements of Pakistan's military intelligence service provided logistical support to the militants who staged July 7, deadly car bombing at the Indian embassy in Kabul. The finding is based partly on unspecified communication intercepts (Warrick, 2008: 1). Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has

warned Pakistani officials that it need to do more to address dangerous ties between the country's intelligence agency and Al-Qaeda linked militants who are growing in power in Pakistan's tribal areas and elsewhere in the country (Mayer, 2008: 8). The ISI has long been accused of arming, training and sponsoring the Taliban and other Islamist extremists, first in Afghanistan and more recently, in Pakistan and of using them as 'agents' for spying in Afghanistan and violence in Kashmir (Mayer, 2008: 8). A Former Pakistani Ambassador, Karamatullah K. Ghori, writes:

Even if one were to give the benefit of doubt to Pakistan's overarching and ubiquitous intelligence agencies for not directly bringing the Taliban into power in Afghanistan, it is an incontrovertible fact that it was the ISI that pampered the Taliban as the de jure government of Afghanistan and smoothed their way to get a stranglehold over Afghanistan. Extending official recognition to the Taliban as the de jure government of Afghanistan was a decision of the Pakistani intelligence outfit and not that of the Foreign Office (Ghori, 2007: 18).

Similarly, Ijaz Ahmad Khan, an Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, views:

The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had not only successfully advocated that it had warded off Pakistan Foreign Ministry's attempt to close certain madressahs in the tribal agencies and near the

Afghan border, which have been the spawning grounds for Taliban hardliners (Khan, 2007: 156).

Historically, a strong and stable Afghanistan is not favoured by Pakistan. It was for only six years of Taliban reign from 1996 to 2001 in Afghanistan that Pakistan had some appearance of 'strategic depth' with the neighbour. Except for Taliban Government no other dispensation in Afghanistan has either been under Pakistan's supervision or favorably disposed to it. A strong government in Afghanistan has always been a motivator for Pashtun and Baloch nationalism in Pakistan and has raised question on controversial, 'Durand line', the borders between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Khan, 2007: 141). Pakistan has also exercised vision of extending the strategic depth to include Islamic state of Central Asia through Taliban held Afghanistan. Hence, Pakistan's pro-Taliban policy has evolved and sustained to balance and counter the Indian influence in Afghanistan and make Afghanistan give up its claims over Pakistan territory. It supported various ethnic groups in Afghanistan opposed to Afghan government in 1974 and then in 1979 built further on that particular support to oppose the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. After a six year interregnum (1988-1994), in 1994, this support shifted to another religious group, the Taliban. This change was a 'tactical adjustment' (Khan, 2007: 141). For its own interests Pakistan continued to support Taliban. And even after the military coup, under General Pervez Musharraf its policy towards Taliban remained unaffected. It continued to view Taliban rule as the best possible means of achieving its goals in Afghanistan (Khan, 2007:155). Thus, domination of Taliban and Islamic groups in Afghan parliament would enable Pakistan to continue with its policies of contributing to instability in Afghanistan, and it is quite likely that it would persist with its agenda

till the so called 'moderate Taliban' is installed in power (Anand, 2008:11).

The upsurge in Taliban operations has led to a war of words between Kabul and Islamabad. Afghanistan claims that Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden and top Taliban leaders are hiding somewhere in Pakistan tribal territory along the Afghan border (Roy, 2006: 14). Taliban's enhanced capabilities are also primarily credited to the support coming from Al-Qaeda and from sections of Pakistani armed forces that are sympathetic to Taliban cause.

While insurgent violence has increased across Afghanistan, governments in Kabul and Islamabad have been seen busy in 'blame game' over the level of Taliban activity and Osama bin Laden's whereabouts. On May 18, 2006 in Asadabad, the capital of Kunar province in Eastern Afghanistan, Afghan President Hamid Karzai charged Pakistani intelligence with providing military training and logistics to Taliban militants hiding in Pakistan and sending them to Afghanistan. He said:

Pakistan should understand that the days are long over gone when Afghan governments were made and unmade in Pakistan (Quoted in Roy, 2006: 15).

Apart from the military offensives against the coalition forces, Taliban is also serving as a 'medium' for the Pakistani establishment to indirectly convey the message that Islamabad will not tolerate any threat to its strategic interests in Afghanistan. The killing of Indian engineer Suryanarayana in April 2006 in Afghanistan by Taliban was an indirect warning from Islamabad to New Delhi not to get unduly involved in Afghanistan, particularly in the Southern parts of the country (Roy, 2006: 14-16). Pakistan has always supported rebel forces in

Afghanistan and is now supporting Taliban and its allies through Pak military and the ISI. The ISI is continuously arming and training Taliban militia mostly in NWFP. Afghan authorities have blamed Pakistan's intelligence for the resurgence of Taliban forces. Islamabad has also been accused of involvement in the mass breakout of Taliban prisoners from the Kandhar central prison in June, 2008. After the most recent attack on the Indian embassy on July 7, 2008 in Kabul the Afghan government was quick to blame Taliban for the attack. The President's official spokesperson, Humayun Hamidzada, further, indirectly accused the Pakistani intelligence agencies of 'masterminding' the attack. He told the media:

The sophistication of this attack and the kind of material that was used in it and the specific targeting everything has a hallmark conducted similar terrorist acts inside Afghanistan in the past. We have sufficient evidence to say that (Quoted in Cherian, 2008: 133-134).

After the attack on a jail in Kandhar on July 13, 2008 President Hamid Karzai's reaction was stronger than usual. He threatened to use force against Pakistan, blaming Islamabad for supporting Taliban attacks. He told the media in June that Afghanistan reserved the right to send its troops across the border into Pakistan. He stressed that it would be an act of 'self defence' because Taliban forces cross the territory from Pakistan to come and kill Afghans and Coalition troops (Cherian, 2008: 59). Failure of Pakistani forces to check the activities of Taliban leaders such as Jalaluddin Haqqani, who has a base in the tribal areas along the Pak-Afghan border, has angered both Kabul and Washington. Western

military officials have told the American media that the Pakistan army was not capable of taking him on. The US political and military leadership has been airing its displeasure with Islamabad for its alleged 'half-hearted' attitude in fighting Taliban. General Dan K. McNeil, Commander of the NATO forces in Afghanistan stated in June, 2008 that stabilizing Afghanistan will be 'impossible' without a more robust military campaign against insurgent heavens in Pakistan (Cherian, 2008: 58). A study undertaken by the Research and Development Corporation (RAND) and funded by the US Department of Defence claimed in June, 2008 that elements in the ISI were aiding the Taliban. The NATO officials also disclosed several instances in which the ISI operatives provided intelligence to Taliban insurgents at the tactical operational and strategic levels (Cherian, 2008: 134).

The strategic involvement of Pakistan in facilitating Taliban extended hospitality within its territory is well documented and widely commented. But there is no evidence as yet of any impact of the world's pressure on Islamabad. This obviously indicates that the Pakistan-Taliban relationship is based on such vital calculations and expectations that even continuous pressure from the international community has proved to be 'ineffective' in convincing Islamabad to change its policy. The factor which "...forces the international community to repeatedly convince Islamabad to change its policy of supporting Taliban is the serious extent of destabilization that the increasingly resurgent Taliban are able to introduce into Afghanistan" (Mukarji, 2007:15).

These facts reveal that Pakistan has become asylum for 'moderate Taliban militia'. It is providing both military and logistic support to Taliban through its military intelligence agency. Therefore, in order to promote its interests in Afghanistan, Pakistan is still fuelling the Taliban insurgency.

Weak and Flawed US Policy:

One of the strongest factors behind Taliban's resurgence is the weak policy of United States. The weak and flawed US policy has let Taliban to grow again on Afghan soil. The major drawback of the US strategy is that it is mostly focused on judicial means, diplomatic pressure and a couple of attempted concealed military operations for only one purpose, i.e. to capture Osama bin Laden and his top aids (Saikal, 2002: 43). It failed to see that Laden and his Al-Qaeda network were closely tied with the Taliban and the ISI. Furthermore, the US leadership has also failed to understand that bin Laden virtually owned the Taliban by providing the militia with millions of dollars and thousands of Arab fighters and that there was little chance of taking out bin Laden and Al-Qaeda leaders without at the same time taking on Taliban and the ISI (Saikal, 2002: 43). It also paid only 'transitory attention' to the wider cruelties of these three forces against the Afghan people.

Another aspect of strange and weak US policy is that Taliban has never been included either on the US State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist organizations or on similar lists of its coalition allies even when the group has killed civilians, government officials, the US and NATO soldiers, besides Afghan army and police personnel. Therefore, in Afghanistan 'double standards' are being practiced by the United States in the interest of political expediency (Anand, 2006: 12). Apart from this, it is also strange that America has made Pakistan its partner in its 'war on terrorism', which is also a 'terrorist country' (Anand, 2006: 12). The US has given about 10 billion US dollars as aid to Pakistan to 'fight against terrorism'. Pakistan is using it against India in Kashmir and also in Taliban's insurgency. The US has also made Afghan civilians its rebels. Reason being, its military attacks have destroyed civilian's homes. Further, many people have died

in these attacks. Reportedly, since 2005 up to 3,200 Afghan civilians have been killed in the US and NATO actions. But the compensation payouts have been far lower than in other global cases. The use of airpower is growing, raising the risks for civilians. Hence, between 2,699 and 3,273 civilians were killed in direct actions by the external forces. By relying upon aerial close support, the US and NATO forces spare their pilots and ground troops but kill lot of innocent Afghan civilians. Air strikes are 4-10 times as deadly for Afghans civilians as are ground attacks. Moreover, the US military gives families of its victims at most 2,500 dollars as a condolence payment not 'compensation which would admit wrong-doing. Canadian per person condolence payments to Afghans since 2006 ranged from 1,100-9,000 dollars. This compares 1.85 million paid for victims of the 1988 bombing of a flight over Lockerbie, Scotland and 150,000 dollars per victim of a 1999 US bombing on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade that killed three Chinese and wounded 23 other people (Harold, 2008: NP). Subsequently Afghan people are helping Taliban to grow again against alien forces on their own soil (Anand, 2006: 12).

Military campaign of the United States against Iraq has also helped Taliban to gain insurgency. As the US forces were raining missiles and bombs on the people of Iraq, the situation in Afghanistan was taking a turn for worse (Cherian, 2003:56). It is indeed ironical that even as the US and its allies praised Pervez Musharraf, former military dictator of Pakistan, as the 'messiah' who would eliminate terrorism. The Western media were inflicting heavy damage on his regime. Visits of the world leaders to Islamabad continued as if they had discovered a new world on the planet (Reddy, 2001:13).

To sum up, Washington has trusted too much on Pakistan, which is the main problem of the US foreign policy. It has never tried to

understand that without destroying terrorist base in Pakistan, they cannot establish peace and stability in Afghanistan. Due to these reasons the US strategy has failed in Afghanistan that allowed Taliban's resurgence.

Pakistani Madrasas:

The 'War on Terrorism' led by the United States in response to September 11 attack identified Islamabad educational institutions in general and madrasas in particular as one of the principal battlegrounds. These madrasas are also allowing Taliban's survival. The US State Department spokesperson Richard Boucher in March 2002 expressed his concern about the spread of religious extremism in Pakistan. The comments by prominent US officials demonstrate that the link between madrasas and terrorism has become a matter of serious concern for the US administration (Mishra, 2006a:27). Madrasa, according to Encyclopedia of Islam, is 'the name of an institution where Islamic sciences are studied'. Traditionally, a madrasa is a place of religious learning that has a long-standing history and has produced many religious scholars and reformists. The objective of madrasa is to introduce Muslim children to basic Quranic teachings, promote an Islamic ethos and groom students for religious duties (Mishra, 2006a: 27). These religious schools are associated with violent domestic turmoil and international terrorism. Some madrasas are breeding grounds for Islamic terrorists to carry on Jihad in Kashmir and other parts of the world. In fact, Pakistan government has also recognized their existence as factories of terror. An Interior Ministry Report of Pakistan, 1995, speculates that about 10-15 percent of madrasas might have link with sectarian militancy or international terrorism. The same impression was provided by the report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2001. One-third of these schools are, reportedly, providing military

training to their students. Some madrasas send their students for training and participation in Afghan civil war without the knowledge of their parents. The Afghan civil war, Saudi funding and the Islamization policy of General Zia Ul Haq led to the mushroom growth of madrasas in Pakistan. In 1947 there were 137 madrasas in the entire country which had grown to 900 by 1971. With General Zia's policy of generously funding the number rose to 8,000 registered madrasas and 25,000 unregistered madrasas, educating over half a million students during the Zia's time. By the end of Zia Ul Haq's regime in 1988 these madrasas became the principal source of education among the poor. By the middle of the year 2000 the number of madrasas had grown nearly to 9,500 registered and unregistered madrasas between 40,000 to 50,000. As Pakistan's state run educational system steadily collapsed these madrasas became the only avenue for boys from poor families to receive the education (Mishra, 2006: 28). The fundamentalists get education in these madrasas. And, therefore, these madrasas work as the 'factories of jihad' from where militants are produced and provide moral and material help to the Taliban.

Illegal Arms and Ammunition:

Illegal arms and ammunition have also served Taliban's resurgence. The supply of illegal arms and ammunitions is mainly carried through Pakistan, Thailand, Cambodia, Tajikistan, Russia and China. China has emerged as the 'main supplier' of old and new small arms and light weapons to Taliban and some of the North-East insurgent groups. The reports reveal that China has replaced Thailand and Cambodia as the 'traditional sources' of small arms and light weapons (Mishra, 2008: 2). Earlier, the Asian black market of weapons was dominated by Thailand and Cambodia, but China has captured the market at present. Taliban forces

in Afghanistan have also been gaining access to Chinese arms. It is opined that the appearance of Chinese HN-5 MANPADS in Taliban's inventory is a source of grave concern. The report clearly indicates that illegal arm supply is still fuelling Taliban's insurgency. The whole network of arm supply is mainly carried through heroin and other drugs instead of money (Starkey, 2008: 11). Taliban forces export heroin and import arms through smuggling. The weapons on sale include machine guns, spiner rifles and anti-aircraft weapons. This trade is done at a bazaar near the old Afghan-Soviet Border in Tajikistan's desert (Mishra, 2008, and Starkey, 2008: 11). Taliban has 'excellent weapons' and 'new field equipments'. They have new Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) technology and commercial communication (Borchgrave, 2008: NP). Taliban fighters use these illegal weapons against the US and NATO forces. Thus, the supply of illegal arms and ammunition has also strengthened Taliban.

Lack of Strong Political Authority

Absence of a strong political authority in Afghanistan provided favorable conditions for Taliban to strengthen their position. The US led 'Operation Enduring Freedom' had crushed out Al-Qaeda and Taliban from Afghanistan. But in the absence of strong political authority, Taliban once again have appeared on the Afghan soil. Most of the Afghans consider President Hamid Karzai as a 'puppet' of the United States (Cherian, 2003: 56). As Ahmed Rashid writes:

Many Afghans see President Hamid Karzai as an increasingly forlorn figure, trapped in the presidential palace as events spin out of his control, grasping for political straws to stave off the widespread disillusionment with his government, begging the

international community for more support (Rashid, 2008:17).

The composition of Afghan Parliament reveals that Islamists, Taliban leaders and warlords, dominate the national legislature. While 40 percent of representatives elected from Kabul have affiliations to former fighters and Mujahideens, their percentage raises to 60 percent in the other provinces. Pashtuns secured 100 parliamentary seats out of 249 in the lower house. This has not prevented other groups from putting obstacles in the path of Afghan government's agenda. The upper house of Afghan Parliament encompasses 108 members out of which 68 are chosen by provincial councils. Besides, 40 members of the House are nominated by the President. Hence, being the Afghan President, Hamid Karzai has nominated a few members of controversial and 'questionable background'. This has also created complications and has adverse impact on the stability and security in Afghanistan. An elected parliament was expected to provide legitimacy and strength to the government. But a weak government in Kabul has been unable to assert itself and govern Afghanistan in a meaningful way (Anand, 2006: 9).

The problem of governance, security, unemployment, opium cultivation and drug trafficking, absence of law and order and reconstruction remain the same even after the overthrow of Taliban regime. Present government has also failed to rebuild the shattered infrastructure including roads, electricity and water supply to wean the farmers from growing poppies (Rashid, 2008: 20). This weak situation of government has opened way for the resurgence of Taliban. The government has not established its authority or credibility. A quarter of teachers is illiterate. Bureaucrats lack most basic education and skills and have corrupt behaviour. People's

contact with them is minimal. Afghan police is notoriously greedy and violent. In the South and East, along the Pakistani border, the vacuum of government has provided an opportunity for gangsters and Taliban. These are the areas where almost all the world's opium is produced (Stewart, 2008: 16).

In a vicious cycle, narcotics, corruption and absence of law and order are rotting the heart of the government and crippling the Afghan economy. Despite massive Western investments Afghanistan is close to be a 'failed state' (Steward, 2008: 16). Weak government, corruption and lack of development has fuelled disillusionment among the Afghans especially in Pashtuns many of whom are at present offering to fight for or at least offer sanctuary to the Taliban (Rashid, 2008: 19).

Conclusion

To conclude, Taliban, a Pashtun Islamic Jihadi movement that rose in Afghanistan from the madrasas of Pakistan and ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001, was mainly a reaction to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The United States also backed Taliban against the Soviet forces through CIA, but after September 11, 2001 it invaded Afghanistan with the help of its allies to uproot Taliban. After the US invasion, Taliban were routed from Afghan soil in 2001. A democratic government was established under the presidentship of Hamid Karzai. There was a

time of peace and stability in Afghanistan after the establishment of democratic government. But since 2006 the incidents reveal that Taliban is again gaining strength which is dangerous for Afghanistan and for the whole South Asia region as well. Diverse forces including poppy cultivation, Pak military and the ISI, Pakistani madrasas, weak US policy, supply of illegal arms and the lack of a strong political authority in Afghanistan are contributing to Taliban's resurgence. Present situation of Afghanistan is very critical. Security is declining with Taliban again becoming active, the opium production is increasing. Masses are losing their patience due to the presence of foreign security forces and Karzai's inability to improve their daily lives. Afghans consider President Karzai as a 'puppet' of the United States. Apart from this, the US has also failed to put Afghanistan back on track. The resurgence reflects the failure of NATO forces. There is a need to take some serious steps to rebuild Afghanistan. The US and its allies should not increase troop numbers. This may inflame Afghan nationalism due to the Afghans' anti-foreign attitude. Taliban had itself gained support by portraying itself as fighting for Islam and Afghanistan against the 'foreign military occupation'. In the nutshell, the US should reconsider the actors and factors which are responsible for resurgence of Taliban. And it should undertake processes of peace, reconstruction and development.

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Возрождение талибов

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Талибан, движение афганских пуштунов, имеющее трансграничные присоединения, правил Афганистаном в период между 1996 и 2001 гг. После событий сентября 2001 года американские военные лишили его власти, что отразилось на снижении политической и военной мощи талибов. Тем не менее, существующий политико-военный сценарий Афганистана показывает, что талибы снова обрели силу и представляют собой серьезную проблему для США и сил их коалиции. Различные национальные и транснациональные факторы и силы, например, выращивание мака, пакистанские военные, Межведомственная разведка (МВР) и медресе, слабая и несовершенная политика США, незаконные поставки оружия и слабое афганское правительство, сыграли решающую роль в его возрождении.

Ключевые слова: Талибан, возрождение, движение, медресе, Афганистан.
