

The Making of the Taliban: Historical and Political Factors Behind Their Ascent

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Abstract.

The Taliban, a militant outfit and the Afghan de facto rulers, are said to have emerged in 1994. However, there is a difference of opinion over their emergence, with some analysts being of the view that the Taliban were the remnants of the Mujahedin (1980s), while some call them a new proxy force. This article explores when and how the Taliban emerged. The Afghan Taliban, accompanied by regional and global powers, Al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban (the banned TTP) and several other militant outfits, emerged and rose to power even more than one's expectations and imagination. The Taliban are considered to be the protégés of Pakistan; however, it was not only Pakistan that helped them quickly rise into power. The article also enquires about the factors that helped the Taliban become a strong militia and quickly rise to power in Afghanistan in 1996. Being logistically and financially supported by the U.S and the then U.S.-allied countries, the Taliban successfully occupied a major area of Afghanistan in 1996 and began ruling over with the name of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan while appointing Mulla Muhammad Omar as their Ameer (leader). They maintained their rule over Afghanistan until they were overthrown by the same regional and global powers which helped them come into power and hold it for almost six years. The study, based on both primary and secondary sources, will also delve into how the Taliban disappointed both regional and global powers, and why the U.S started the War on Terror, particularly against the Afghan Taliban.

Key words: The Taliban, The U.S, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Rule, Support.

Introduction

The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan on December 24, 1979, had security and political implications far beyond Afghanistan. The invasion made the land of Afghanistan a battleground first between the resistance groups shaped as well as sponsored by foreign factors and the Soviet Union itself, while later on, for the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and the United States after the Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989. The withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan created a political vacuum that ultimately created a euphoria among the mujahedin (resistance groups that fought against the Soviet Union) and their supporters. The communist government of Dr. Najeeb was thought to have collapsed within a year. The United States and Pakistan attempted to give the mujahidin an alternative government by encouraging them to form the Afghan Interim Government and by supplying them with better weapons. This government was a facade; however, Pakistan increased its support for their traditional favorite among the mujahidin, namely Mr. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his faction with expectations of imposing a unified organizational

structure under the influence of Islamabad. In 1992 the Soviet-crafted regime in Kabul collapsed when its constituent factions realized that the flow of resources from Moscow was about to dry up. As the government fell apart, people and mujahidin belonging to different castes, creeds, and factions moved to join the concerned factions such as Pashtuns joined Hekmatyar's faction, Shia figures joined the main Shia resistance group and the communists sided with Ahmed Shah Massoud. After the Soviet withdrawal, each of these factions tried their best and fought each other in order to occupy some major cities or provinces within Afghanistan so as to impose their government over there. Aided and sponsored by foreign factors including some Arab states and militants, these competing factions battled for Kabul and other regions within Afghanistan. These fights created bloodshed, murders, and casualties among the mujahidin and more importantly, it created a huge political and social chaos in the country. This state of anarchy and shifting alliances persisted until the rise of the Taliban who forced these rivals into discordant alliances. The Taliban were welcomed in Pashtun areas the most which were thoroughly tired of the misrule of other factions. The Taliban came with the intention of institutionalizing their brand of Islam and building up their state in the name of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, but they could only make their regime which lasted for at least six years which had implications far beyond Afghanistan. The rise of the Taliban had firm roots in the regional and international politics of the 1980s and 1990s. In the late 1970s, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and revolutionary reforms of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan appeared to the Afghan masses as an assault on their traditional and Islamic values. This understanding provoked both their religious sentiments and political conservatism as a rational means of self-defense, resulting in the formation of resistance groups who identified themselves as mujahidin (Holy warriors) who wage jihad. In order to benefit from mujahidin, the United States jumped into the ground and responded by supporting mujahidin resistance groups against the Soviet-backed communist government in Kabul, as a result, Afghanistan became an active battleground between the two very superpowers; the United States of America and the Soviet Union. In order to support the Afghan mujahidin, Jimmy Carter's administration began allying with other Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan in particular. This effort was significantly expended during Reagan's administration and placed under the direct responsibility of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).¹ Islamabad has also become actively involved in the Afghan civil war of Afghanistan when the Soviet-backed government, which also had Indian support, emerged. Islamabad then adopted a liberal policy through which it received some 150,000 refugees.²

In the emergence of the mujahidin, the U.S regional allies also contributed equally, Saudi Arabia matched U.S. financial assistance dollar for dollar, the Pakistani secret agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and Egypt became the main military supplier and training ground.³ Meanwhile, Pakistan, an all-time front ally, developed as a conduit for military and civil assistance for the resistance fighters and refugees and remained engaged in the training and recruitment of mujahidin, especially from religious schools (madrasas) situated in Pakistan being controlled by the two main religious parties; Jamiat Ulem-e- Islam and Juma'at -e-Islami of Pakistan. Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam has played a huge role in the Afghan-Soviet war.⁴ Pakistani President, General Zia-Ul-Haq, to whom the United States of America had made an offer of \$ 100 million for the creation of a force to fight the Soviet Union, had played a huge role in the creation of Mujahidin force. According to a report, by 1981, Pakistan stood at second after Israel among the countries which was receiving American aid. It is noteworthy that despite a worldwide appeal to Gen. Zia not to hang Zulfikar Ali Bhutto up, the United States came forward and made an alliance with Gen. Zia who later awarded even his Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency a monopoly over the distribution, training, shipment, of military and financial assistance to the Afghan resistance groups.⁵ The ISI further focused on seven particular groups whose ideologies generally matched

with Zia's doctrine of Islamization of Pakistan. It granted special status to those who were either associated with or supported by Jama'at-e-Islami (J.I) Pakistan, the most powerful extremist group and Zia's ally in the government. Similarly, the rest of the moderate groups were asked either to accept one of these seven or leave Pakistan and, in this regard, ISI was authorized to select the leadership among the very seven groups.⁶ It is noteworthy that these seven were the groups which emerged from within the Afghan refugees settled in Pakistani refugee camps and Pakistan encouraged the formation of such groups. These groups had aimed to force the Soviets out of Afghanistan and establish an Islamic political system in Afghanistan. Critics soon pointed out that the ISI was involved in the formation of the groups.⁷

The Rise of the Mujahidin

After the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on December 24, 1979, the United States of America was afraid of the prevalence of Communism in the Asian region. The invasion was considered by the West as a threat to Middle Eastern oil reserves, the fulfilment of the Russian dream to reach warm waters, and more importantly a threat to the status quo in the region and beyond; an interference by a superpower to forcefully add another republic to its vast land mass.⁸ The US needed a force to counter the Soviet troops in Afghanistan so as to prevent Communism from being prevalent in the region. For this purpose, the United States of America had made an offer of \$ 100 million to the then President General Zia-Ul-Haq, in order to create a force which was tasked to fight the Soviet Union troops. The then U.S. State Secretary, Hillary Clinton herself acknowledged in an interview with Fox News, "The U.S needed a force to fight in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union and to contain communism from being prevailed in the region. Thus, the U.S. decided to go to Pakistan and create a force of mujahidin, equipped them with stinger missiles and anything else to fight the Soviets inside Afghanistan."⁹

Gen. Zia, who was under worldwide pressure of not to hang the PPP leader Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, just needed slight support to save himself from the pressure and allegations of being a strict dictator who had censored each and everything including the media. Finally, Gen. Zia agreed and the United States came forward and made an alliance with Gen. Zia who later awarded even his Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency a monopoly over the distribution, training, and shipment, of military and financial assistance to the Afghan resistance groups. For the first time in history, the Afghan mujahidin received official recognition and access to unchecked military and financial assistance. As a result, the Islamist groups of mujahidin pushed back moderate Islamists and pro-democracy resistance forces with the help of the U.S.-backed Pakistani military and financial support.¹⁰ In the mid-1980s the Afghan Islamists used international assistance to establish hundreds of religious boarding schools where they recruited thousands of refugees who fled to Pakistan as a result of Soviet bombardment on the internal social basis of resistance groups.¹¹ These students were trained militarily and further began to preach the political ideology of these Islamists in thousands of Masajid (religious places) on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistani border that consistently expounded upon the necessity of militant warfare. Some 20,000 to 30,000 mujahidin from all over the Islamic world and students from Madrassas were encouraged, armed, financed, and trained to confront the Soviet's war machine. It is noteworthy that the number of these religious schools unpredictably increased after the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.¹² Pakistan exported thousands of madrasa-educated students to Afghanistan which helped the mujahidin overcome Soviet troops.¹³ It is noteworthy that by 1995 there were almost 4,000 religious schools in Pakistan. By 2001, there were about 10,000 madrassas with around 1 million to 1.7 million students compared to 1.9 million students in regular primary schools. Today there are more than an estimated 32,000 madrassas with 2.5 million students.¹⁴ The main reason

why the number of students increased is the non-stoppable flow of financial aid from the U.S. and Gulf States. A major number of these madrassas were sponsored by foreign funds from the United States of America and the Gulf States.¹⁵ With the passage of time, these messengers gave Afghan Islamists an extended arm with which to influence political culture via a centralized political system similar to the one pushed by the Afghan communists within the mujahidin-controlled areas. As a result, the traditional political culture of Afghanistan was suppressed in these regions, the right of decision-making, previously enjoyed by local Jirgas established by the same Islamists, was now disbanded and the rule of military commanders and Islamists was imposed.¹⁶ It is worth mentioning that the graduates of these Islamist schools i.e., Madrasas, totally lacked proper knowledge and more particularly, lack of understanding of Afghan history. They were unfamiliar with cultural norms, neighborhood traditions, and the historical heritage of local communities. One of the graduates was of the view that nationalism and love for the country is irreligious and Islam does not have boundaries and we are fighting for the victory of Islam. In practice, the students were trained in, and lived through, the mandates of Islamist political ideology to prepare them for “Paradise” by resisting all those who thought, dressed, and behaved differently from how these Mujahidin were trained. They wrote down their own history and began to oppose and condemn the rest of the traditions and history. It is noteworthy that this chain of schools was being handled by Hekmatyar (a pro-Pakistan fighter) which finally resulted in the creation of Lashker-e-Isar (Army of Sacrifice) in 1992 and its members were deployed to the South of Kabul taking the capital. These students were now blind followers of their leader Hekmatyar and carried his orders without any hesitation and discriminately bombarded Kabul, killing and wounding thousands of civilians.¹⁷

Factors that Led to the Emergence of the Taliban

Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the Afghan society remained divided into two main factions; the Kabul government led by Dr. Najeebullah, a communist, and the mujahidin groups led by several conflicting groups. Islamabad (Pakistan) rejected the coalition government in Kabul and increased its support for its favorite one among the mujahidin, i.e., Mr. Gulbaddin Hekmatyar and his faction, the Hisb-e-Islami (Islamic party) in hopes of imposing a unified organizational structure under the influence of Islamabad. With the support of the CIA and Saudi financing, the ISI pushed for a military victory to install Afghan Islamists in Kabul without informing major mujahidin field commanders. Because of Islamist groups’ incapability to fund those thousands of schools that they had established, the schools were now taken over by Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) of Pakistan.¹⁸ However, these competing factions failed to form a unanimous national government and as a result, a civil war sparked which lasted for two years resulting in the loss of thousands of civilians’ lives and casualties and more importantly the emergence of a chaotic situation across the country.¹⁹ The groups belonging to different factions were also involved in social evils like looting drivers on highways, torturing local people, forced marriages and raps, banditry, brutality against the local residents, and offense against local values such as “Nang” (reputation), and “Namus” (local honor, especially respect to women). Following the civil war, murders, rapes, thefts, and extortions were widespread all across Afghanistan.²⁰ The already war-torn Afghan society was exhausted of these competing groups and militias and their mischievous behavior, and it was searching for a solution. Such a socially and politically chaotic situation gave rise to a vacuum of leadership and gave momentum to the appearance of a political force named the Taliban that came with a promise to stop fighting, and further destruction as well as maintain law and order and bring peace across the country. Led by Mullah Muhammad Omar, the initial group of the

Taliban emerged in the very Pashtun-dominated Southern part of Kandahar as a local response to the former resistance groups and militias who had created chaos and anarchy in Afghanistan. The Taliban actually grew from a small group of idealistic students with little military training into a sprawling organization that dominated some 90% of Afghanistan in less than five years.²¹

Nick B. Mills maintains in his book *Karzai the Failing American Intervention and the Struggle for Afghanistan* that according to Hamid Karzai, the Taliban, in actuality, were young boys who came from Afghanistan to Pakistan as a result of the Soviet bombardment where they were seeking religious knowledge in madrasas (religious schools) in Pishin, Killa Abdullah, Kuchlak, and Quetta, located in Pakistan. Karzai further mentioned that these young boys were extremely worried about the chaotic situation in their country, Afghanistan. Karzai said that these young boys came to me in order to take suggestions regarding going to Afghanistan to maintain the law and order situation in the country. He further said that I knew these Taliban (young boys), but those who were well-trained and well-equipped were unknown to me and these were perhaps the trained personnel of the Pakistan Army who went to Afghanistan in the name of the Taliban.²² The word “Talib” actually means a person seeking religious knowledge. The word “Taliban” is the plural of “Talib”.²³ Pakistan’s involvement in Afghanistan for more than two decades led to the establishment of the Taliban regime, and then it had secured a front-line position in the war on terror, that has targeted the Taliban, and now its former allies and partners in Afghanistan criticize its changing foreign policy that was contrast to the one which was before the September 11.²⁴

The Taliban movement emerged in the context of the civil war and the chaotic situation prevalent in Afghanistan in 1994. A small group, calling itself the Taliban, vowed to bring vigilant justice and peace, law and order, and more particularly, “pure” Islam to Afghanistan based on extremist interpretations.²⁵ The movement was led by a one-eyed person namely Mullah Muhammad Omar, who was a religious scholar in the Maiwand district of Afghanistan. He had been a member of one of the Mujahidin groups, Hizb-e-Islami headed by Younas Khalis. The Taliban, who stood up for law and order and prompt dispensation of justice, were seen as protectors of the defenseless against rapacious warlords and gangster officials. Subsequently, they rapidly rose to fame, and people from within Afghanistan, and from certain seminaries in Pakistan, mainly the Afghani students educated in the Madrasas of Karachi, KPK, and Balochistan in Pakistan during the Soviet war who later joined the Taliban movement.²⁶ It is worth mentioning that Mullah Omar had already headed a religious school in a remote area of Kandahar due to what he had been associated with Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam which is now being headed by Moulana Fazl-Ur-Rehman, a strong ally of Benazir Bhutto’s government in 1994. Fazl-Ur-Rehman brought Omar to the attention of the Pakistani government which put Minister of Interior Affairs Nasirullah Babar (who himself was a staunch supporter of the Taliban and the one who influenced the attitude of Benazir Bhutto’s government towards the Taliban) in charge of logistic support for the Taliban which enabled the Taliban to move forces and take over the strategic province of Kandahar, rapidly expanding towards Herat freeing it from Ismail Khan on 5th of September, 1995. Interestingly, there was no criticism after the fall of Herat to the Taliban because the U.S. along with Pakistan’s ISI considered it helpful to their strategy of Unocal and tightening the nose of Iran.²⁷ After the fall of Herat, Kabul also fell to the Taliban on September 27, 1996.²⁸ Similarly, another direct contact between the Taliban and the Pakistani government came as a result of the blockage and looting of a Pakistani convoy at Spin Boldak Highway which was under the control of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hizb-e-Islami. In August 1994, a thirty-truck convoy bound for Turkmenistan accompanied by several Pakistani officials including Colonel Jawad Imam, an ISI field officer, was stopped at gunpoint by the militia groups who had control over some checkpoints of Spin Boldak.²⁹ These notorious militant groups

were answerable to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. When Mullah Omar realized about the incident, he called his former military brethren to bear arms in the name of justice to protect the locals as well as release the Pakistani convoy. And, finally, in October 1994, the Taliban captured Spin Boldak clearing it from the forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The Taliban not only took over the control of the stronghold of Hekmatyar but also seized a significant amount of weaponry and other goods. They then cleared the highway of roadblocks in the direction of Kandahar and eventually on November 5, 1994, they captured Kandahar too.³⁰ This act not only pleased the Pakistani government but also attracted its attention and the Taliban began to receive both military and financial assistance. The mujahidin leader, a shocked Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, claimed and attributed the Taliban's success of the invasion on Spin Boldak, the seizure of his weapons and ammunition depot to support from Pakistani artillery. Actually, it was the same support that Hekmatyar had tasted and enjoyed and the one that had enabled him to take over the town six years earlier. The reason why Pakistani support diverted from Hekmatyar to the Taliban was because Hekmatyar failed to break the settlement around Kabul, said the chief advocate of the shipment, the Interior Minister Mr. Naseerullah Babar. Similarly, the Taliban also captured Helmand from Ghafar Akhundzada in early 1995, and soon in February 1995, Maidanshar also fell to them.³¹ Apart from capturing the above-mentioned major cities of Afghanistan, receiving courageous and notable support from local and foreign factors, more particularly from Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) of Pakistan which mobilized both Afghani and non-Afghani students from religious schools (Madrasas) which located in Quetta, Kuchlak, Pishin, Karbala, Bagarzai, and few other regions in Pakistan working under the supervision of religious scholars belonging to Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) headed by Moulana Fazl-Ur-Rehman, the Taliban decided to move against Kabul, a stronghold of Hekmatyar, what they finally captured on 27th September 1996 with the help of Pakistan Army's training and direction and Saudi petro-dollars. Hekmatyar had to flee his base in Chaharasyab leaving immense resources behind for the victorious Taliban. The Taliban also institutionalized their version of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in Kabul.³² Similarly, the Taliban occupied the area of Salang and Panjshir in February 1997 including the provincial capital of Chaharikar. Now the Taliban received official recognition from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The Taliban is a creature of Pakistan_ created, equipped, trained, and directed by ISI and financed by Gulf States. The Taliban were channeled some \$ 30 million by ISI a year in 1997-98.³³ Apart from this, the Taliban later captured Paktya and Paktika too. They also brought Shias under their control because the Shiites had no choice and alternative for their survival, but to surrender after the Taliban successfully defeated Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's and Ahmad Shah Massoud's resistance groups. Additionally, the Taliban mobilized towards Mazar-e-Sharif where they slaughtered thousands of Hazaras and Uzbeks while capturing the city on May 19, 1997. Moreover, in 1999-2000, with the assistance of Pakistani and Al-Qaida reinforcements, the Taliban succeeded in capturing Kunduz and Taluqan while squeezing Ahmad Shah Massoud (the only resistance to the Taliban force) into the northeast corner of Afghanistan. It is worth mentioning that despite having a very considerable amount of resources of Pakistani intelligence machine (ISI) and Saudi's Petro-dollars behind them, the Taliban were unable to defeat Ahmad Shah Massoud for five years after he withdrew from Kabul. However, he was killed on the 7th of September 2001 in a suicide attack launched by an Al-Qaeda member acting as a journalist.³⁴ Ahmad Shah Massoud survived much as compared to other resistance group leaders such as Uzbek leader Abdul Rashid Dostum who quickly fled to Turkey and Ismail Khan who fled to Iran after their strongholds were captured by the Taliban. The Taliban then had almost occupied 90% of Afghanistan by September 1996.³⁵ Thus, it can be stated that it was the foreign factors that helped

the Taliban rise, prosper, and expand faster than they believed. They successfully captured such a huge area and began to rule over it. After Taliban's occupation of eastern areas of Afghanistan, where Osama Bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda had adopted residence, brought close ties between Osama Bin Laden and Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar which further converted into a strong bond between the two leaders and their respective organizations.³⁶ The Taliban, after gaining massive power and support from locals and far beyond Afghani borders, totally rejected the religious and political ideologies of other Islamists and the resistance groups, and more particularly they even criticized the former mujahidin for not building a central political institution. Thus, they championed the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Afghanistan in the name of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the supreme leader Mullah Muhammad Omar proclaimed himself to be the "Ameer-Ul-Momineen" i.e. the Commander of the Faithfull. The name of Afghanistan was renamed as the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the Taliban tore down all the previous laws and imposed their own tribal code of social conduct that provided reassurance to the society traumatized by nearly fifteen years of violence. They named the law as "Sharia" which was to be followed by every person residing in the areas under the Taliban's hold and anyone rejecting the law (Sharia) was to be declared as a rebel and executed as per the Sharia. Additionally, Ameer-Ul-Momineen's order had to be followed by everyone, and whenever, wherever the Ameer would summon the people to Jihad, it was obligatory for all the very qualified Muslims to follow his order, bear arms against the enemies of the Ameer-Ul-Momineen, and join the jihad.³⁷ The Taliban also occupied Zabul and Uruzgan and expanded their hold through many Pashtun-dominated areas where some of the commanders from resistance groups surrendered and agreed to work under the Taliban while some were disarmed. The Taliban burnt down puppy fields, closed down girls' schools, eliminated roadblocks, imposed Sharia-based civic order, and provided a rare unifying moment in the region's history.³⁸

After the U.S. proposal to create a force, the U.S-backed ISI recruited hundreds of thousands of students with the help of religious parties for Jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir in the 1980s. The U.S-backed ISI trained, and armed the mujahidin resistance groups and channeled money to them from the United States of America and the Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia in order to turn the table towards the Soviets by 1989.³⁹ In return for help in Afghan and Kashmir jihad, the ISI would rig elections for the religious parties in elections and would allow them freedom to operate. The religious parties provided ISI the recruits with personnel, cover, and deniability. The average age of these students was 12 to 16 years who could easily be misguided. The Qaris, Mullahs (the supervisor/ the religious scholars or the managers) would tell them to go for jihad if they get martyred they would directly reach Jannah (the paradise) and if they deny going for jihad they would categorically become infidel and their denial may invite the wrath of Almighty Allah. A female reporter of the New York Times was answered by the deputy director of Jamia Islamiyah Madrasa, a religious school located on Hajji Ghaibi Road Quetta which had displayed a board proudly declaring "long live Mullah Omar" in the praise of Taliban's leader and "Long live Fazal-Ur-Rehman" the J-U-I leader, that they just tell students to go on Jihad as it is written in the Qur'an that it is every Muslim's right to fight jihad. The Deputy Director also admitted that he has sent almost 280 students for jihad in Afghanistan with his hands from the same madrasa. The above evidence shows how the madrassas under the control of ISI-backed Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam and Juma'at-i-Islami exerted huge pressure on young students to go and fight as mujahidin in Afghanistan or enroll themselves in suicide bomb camps. Sandy Gall also claims that Quetta was the hub for the Taliban movement while Pishin, Kuchlak, Karbala, and Bagarzai were the main centers for the movement of the Taliban.⁴⁰

Besides this, several other factors helping the Taliban to emerge are as under;

1. The shared Pashtun ethnicity and Pashtun-dominated areas which were tired of other factions' brutalities.
2. The religious piety/factor, lack of religious knowledge and education.
3. The use of money given by the U.S. and Gulf States to induce opposing commanders to the Taliban to switch sides or surrender to the Taliban by taking money.
4. Pakistan's support helped in an expedite rise and success of the Taliban.
5. The U.S. and Saudi's strategy of importing oil from Turkmenistan by helping the Taliban; a pro-Pakistani government in Kabul.

The Taliban received much support from within Pakistan such as from the Pakistan Army, government, and society, more particularly, the religious parties such as Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam and Juma'at-e-Islami as well as the like-minded people. It would not be incorrect to say that the Taliban in actuality were a Pakistani proxy army in Afghanistan fighting on the directions coming to them from Islamabad. Benazir Bhutto directed her administration to support the Taliban movement, but actually, she wanted an end to the murderous inter-mujahidin civil war.⁴¹ Additionally, the then President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf also clearly claimed in his Memoir that the Taliban were actually assisted by Pakistan to rise and were being supported by Pakistan for strategic purposes and that they were our heroes including Osama Bin Laden.⁴²

Another question arises pertaining to the identity of the Taliban.

The identity of the Taliban is still under question and yet to be explored who they actually are. Some of the researchers suggest that the Taliban in identity are Durrani as opposed to Khilji while others argue that it is the Pashtun identity that mattered. As far as I think, they cannot be declared as Pashtun just because they valued the norms and values of the Pashtun nation which are "Nang" (reputation), and "Namus" (local honor, especially respect for women) which are still being followed by Pashtun nation, a major population of Afghanistan generating almost 49% of the total population. Moreover, they received huge support from Pakistan, especially from the Pashtun belt including the Federal Government of that time, does not mean they were Pashtun by identity. They also received much support from Gulf States, so what if one claims that the Taliban are Arab-originated.⁴³ Mussa Khan Jalalzai also mentions that the Taliban were not totally Pashtuns, but also Uzbek, Tajiks, and Turkman who were fighting against the so-called Mujahidin groups under the leadership of Mullah Muhammad Omar, Mullah Rabbani, and a few others.⁴⁴ Thus, one cannot identify the Taliban as Pashtun on the basis of such arguments. Rather the Taliban consistently downplayed tribal and regional identities i.e. village identities. However, the answer to the question of their quick appearance and emergence is that they received a plethora of both military and financial support from foreign factors like the United States of America, Gulf States like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and South Asian State like Pakistan in particular which provide both military and financial support to the Taliban in order to counter Soviet influence in Afghanistan while Pakistan intended to counter Indian influence as well.⁴⁵ The factors that helped them appear and emerge quicker than any other organization or faction in Afghanistan included; exclusive access to a pool of madrassa students, a widespread desire for law and order in the war-torn society of Afghanistan, foreign factors like Pakistan, the United States of America and the Gulf States respectively. It is worth mentioning that the Taliban were accepted by the masses because of not what they were, but because of what they were not. People in Pashtun-dominated area were exhausted from the fights among the competing factions on a daily basis. The Taliban

were perceived as neutral, and promoting selfless order. This was what proved to be helpful in their quick and successful expansion in these areas all across Afghanistan.⁴⁶ As far as the case of their religious identity is concerned, Hassan Abbas traces their ideological roots to the Deobandi tradition (mostly prevailing in South Asia), intricately woven with Salafism and Wahhabism, which transformed from an anti-colonial stance to a justification for armed jihad, strategically employed by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan.⁴⁷

Taliban and the U.S. Concerns After 9/11

The United States of America's production, the Taliban, had been produced with the collaboration of Pakistan and the Gulf States. These well-trained and well-equipped Taliban now had built close ties with Al-Qaeda and its leader Osama Bin Laden, an Arab guy, who had adopted residence in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, more particularly, in an area under the control of the Taliban. On 11th September 2001 when Al-Qaeda attacked the World Trade Center which resulted in the killing of 2977 people and hundreds of injuries, Osama Bin Laden's thunderbolt thoroughly changed the political and strategic scenario overnight. Less than a month later, on October 7, 2001, the U.S. began to firebombing Afghanistan in retaliation, bringing down the Taliban's government and driving it out of power. Masood Khalil, another commander of Massoud's faction claimed and was convinced that ISI was also part of the conspiracy.⁴⁸ The U.S. had excellent relations with the Taliban and initially had a supportive policy towards them till 1996. Even the U.S. State Department once issued a statement justifying that "nothing objectionable" was found on the side of the Taliban. Such a policy was only on the basis of the U.S. strategic and economic interests. The U.S. wanted to have access to the "world's largest resources of oil and gas" in the newly formed Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. But the U.S. soon became foe from friend to the Taliban as a result of the Taliban's support to Al-Qaeda and their refusal to hand Osama over to the United States of America. The U.S. along with Saudi Arabia decided to cut off their aid relations with Afghanistan (The Taliban government). Moreover, the U.S. imposed sanctions on Taliban under a resolution of the United Nations on October 15, 1999.⁴⁹

Operation Enduring Freedom

After the wave of terrorist attacks worldwide and more importantly in the U.S., The United States of America decided to launch an operation namely Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan on 7th October 2001.⁵⁰ The U.S. secret agency, the CIA, sent its two officials, Mr. Gary Schroen and Mr. Gary Bentsen, and a hand full of assistants, their suitcase bugling with crisp new \$100 bills, and orders to link up with General Abdul Rashid Dostum and Atta Muhammad in the northern area. The mujahidin of the Northern Alliance were itching to get their revenge on the Taliban and were searching for such an opportunity which the United States of America finally provided them and it was no less than a blessing for them. The U.S., accompanied by the mujahidin, launched Operation Enduring Freedom without deploying thousands of American forces and launching a full-scale expedition. The U.S. set forth the fearsome firepower of the B-52s and ground-attack aircraft with the combination of the Northern Alliance mujahidin and wreaked havoc on the Taliban who had never experienced such kind of warfare before. The Taliban, unexpectedly, began giving themselves up at first in the tens and twenties, then in hundreds, and later on in thousands, and finally surrendered at Kunduz, a northern area.

In order to protect itself from another incident similar to 9/11, the U.S decided to launch an attack at Tora Bora, a natural stronghold of former anti-Soviet mujahidin and now a residence of Osama Bin Laden, the very mastermind, the instigator of 9/11 and more significantly, the number one enemy of the American public, and a worldwide wanted terrorist. The U.S. tasked three major commanders; Hazrat Ali, Hajji Zaman Ghamsharik, and Hajji Zahir of Northern Alliance, to kill or capture Bin Laden alive as demanded by the then President, George Washington Bush. However, Bin Laden was neither killed nor caught alive as the three local commanders, who had been tasked to kill or catch Bin Laden alive, were said to have been bribed by al-Qaeda. Hazrat Ali directly disappeared from the scene. Hajji Zaman Ghamsharik was killed in a bomb attack launched by the Taliban in February 2010, in Jalalabad while Hajji Zahir, however, to some extent became successful completing his task and attacked Tora Bora with CIA-backed support, but could not capture Bin Laden as he had already escaped to Parachinar, Pakistan and his dream of global jihad finally came true as major attacks took place in World's major cities like London, New York, Madrid, Indian embassy Kabul, 2008, and Subway System in March 2003 and India. Because of his failure to capture Bin Laden, the operation charge was now taken from Gary Schroen and was given into the hands of Gary Bentsen who had an old hand in the secret world of the CIA and was working at the organization's counter-terrorism center in Washington in October 2001. His Boss, Cofer Black summoned him and put his order before Gary Bentsen, and said, "Before Gary Schroen deployed, I told him I wanted Bin Laden's head in a box. I want that and more from you. Now it is your time to make war. Gary, I want you killing the enemy immediately". And Gary left for Afghanistan the next day. Ultimately, the U.S. and CIA could not achieve their main target of killing Bin Laden or catching him alive.⁵¹ In October 1999, Army Chief General Musharraf imposed Martial Law in Pakistan exiling the elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif which annoyed the U.S. President Bill Clinton because he had met Nawaz several times. In March 2000 when Clinton came back to Pakistan from India, his agenda for meeting with Pakistani President Musharraf was; human rights, democracy, the future of Nawaz, non-proliferation, tensions with India, nuclear test ban, fissile material cutoff talks, World Bank loans, and a host of other issues vying war, were for the top tier. However, he only focused on Bin Laden, Al-Qaeda and terrorism. During Bill Clinton's era, especially by March 2000, Pakistan was under virtually every type of sanctions imposed by the U.S. No military or financial aid was flowing. Musharraf was expecting much more from Clinton's visit to Pakistan and in return to help America in crashing Al-Qaeda and capturing Osama, but Clinton had nothing to offer except an official visit from American president. Not only this, but he also warned Musharraf that terrorism would eventually destroy Pakistan from within side if he did not move against it. The president stayed for only four hours and also addressed the Pakistani nation promoting the slogan of democracy. He also asked the military to return to their barracks and allow free and fair elections.⁵² Pervez Musharraf had helped the U.S. in an anti-Al-Qaeda operation and also helped the CIA capture some key Al-Qaeda figures, but never delivered the most wanted person all over the world, Osama Bin Laden. Former Afghani Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah said that Musharraf played the American Administration skillfully, throwing dust in Bush's eyes. Beneath the dust, the Jihad would flourish.⁵³ It is noteworthy that during the very first six months of G.W. Bush's administration, there was no such a significant development in bilateral relations of Pak-U.S. The George W. Bush Administration contradictory to Clinton, was more concerned about nuclear proliferation rather than Al-Qaeda. Even in mid-2001, Bush's national security principals discussed Pakistan's atomic actions. However, a significant development was witnessed when Musharraf dispatched his D.G ISI, Gen. Mehmood to Washington in order to soften the bilateral relations by convincing CIA and

the administration that the Taliban were misunderstood. They are simple Pashtuns and Afghan citizens who could deliver law and order. The U.S should stop isolating them, rather the U.S. should engage with them. On the basis of the above arguments, one can say that Pakistan had supported the Taliban for its national interests.⁵⁴ Gen. Mehmood was still in U.S that World Trade Center was attacked on September 11, 2001. Gen. Mehmood was summoned to the State Department to see Deputy State Secretary Richard Armitage who gave Mehmood two options “whether Pakistan would cooperate with U.S against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban or it would be bombed back into the stone age” while Mehmood agreed for the former one. Similarly, President George Washington Bush also asked categorically “whether you are with us or against us” to what President Musharraf responded positively and agreed to support the United States of America and allowed its aircrafts fly over Pakistani territory and airbases to strike targets in Afghanistan and for emergency landings.⁵⁵ On the other hand, Musharraf insisted that India must have no role in Afghan war and the government which would follow the Taliban’s one. While Pakistan would insist on capturing Al-Qaeda operatives who fled to Pakistan, Pakistani citizens i.e. members of Laskar-e-Taiba and other Punjabi groups would be off limits in any move to counter terrorism. Next, Gen. Mehmood was sent to Afghanistan so as to convince Mullah Omar that the world had changed and Osama was a liability. Mehmood put forth U.S demand which Omar denied and replied “*It is against the norms and values of Pashtunwali.*” Mehmood is said to be pro-Taliban, even he is blamed for convincing Omar not to hand Osama over to the U.S. It is noteworthy that Gen. Mehmood was later on fired by Musharraf. The fact cannot be denied that if Pakistan had stayed with the Taliban, it could have to bear serious “consequences and the major beneficiary of the situation would be India. Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal would have been at risk, our military forces would have been jeopardized and we did not want to lose or damage the military parity what it had achieved with India by being a nuclear weapon state”, said Musharraf.⁵⁶ The Pakistani-backed Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which lasted for six years, collapsed within three months on October 9, 2001, when Pakistan stopped its support and the U.S. alongside the Northern Alliance began attacking the Taliban. Pakistan arrested some handful of the Taliban officials including their ambassador to Pakistan, in Islamabad who was later on turned over to U.S.A. This act extremely enraged the Taliban who had enjoyed full-fledged support from Pakistan. Pakistan also arrested 670 Al-Qaeda operatives including the so-called mastermind of 9/11, Khalid Sheikh from Rawalpindi and Abu Zubaydah from Faisalabad. In return for the help, Bush asked Congress giving some relief to Pakistan pertaining to sanctions imposed under Pressler amendments. Thus, Pakistan was given relief and the doors of both financial and military aids were opened for Pakistan and ultimately Bush’s wish of having good relations with Pakistan was also fulfilled. Musharraf became frequent visitor to Bush’s white house while Pakistan became a major recipient of American military aid. It is stated that military aid would exceed \$10-billion by 2008 when Musharraf left his office. However, the good relations with the U.S worsened Pakistan’s relations with the Taliban who had been fighting for the interests of both Pakistan and the U.S.⁵⁷ The U.S concerns multiplied when it found ISI’s collaboration with anti-Indian groups like Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba and more importantly about its nuclear proliferation to Iran, North Korea, and Libya, and the activities of Dr. Abdul Qadir Khan, the nuclear scientist of Pakistan. Former CIA director, Tenet showed concrete evidence of Pakistan’s proliferation to Libya (including the bomb design) via. A.Q Khan. Musharraf put Qadir Khan under house arrest and blamed him for working beyond the authority of his job.⁵⁸ The former Prime Minister Meer Zafarullah Khan Jamali in an interview said that in 2004, President Musharraf wanted to hand Abdul

Qadir Khan over to America and even a U.S. airplane was waiting at the airport to take A.Q Khan to America, but I refused to sign A.Q Khan's departing documents and secured him.⁵⁹

Pakistan's Dismays

Pakistan, a South Asian country occupies a significant strategic location in the region. Indeed, the same is the reason why the U.S. often keeps its eyes on Pakistan and tries to bow down towards Pakistan whenever it faces any troubled situation or it is the case of U.S. strategic, economic and political interests. In the 1970s when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the U.S. came to Pakistan taking it in confidence to create a force to contain Communism in the region, defeat the USSR, and get access to the World's largest oil and gas resources and the largest trade market in the newly born Central Asian states. Benazir Bhutto's government viewed access to these central Asian markets, transport of energy and gas, and oil-rich states as critically vital for Pakistani industry and an unstable economy. The transportation of oil and especially, gas from Turkmenistan which is estimated to have been the World's largest gas reserves, via Afghanistan to Pakistan had already emerged as a possibility. Thus, Pakistan became an important player in the construction of two giant pipelines. The U.S. oil company Unocal and Saudi oil company Delta sought contracts to build pipelines worth over \$ 4 billion.⁶⁰ Ultimately, the U.S. gave the green signal to Islamabad for the Taliban's support rather than Hekmatyar's group which had failed to capture Kabul. Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto also confessed in her interview that her government in joint venture with JUI, Pakistani merchants and trucking network had trained the Taliban militarily. Indeed, supporting Taliban could fulfill two important goals; i) Trade and access to Central Asian States' trade markets and gas resources, and ii) Strategic advantage in future war against India. It is worth mentioning that the trade from Pakistan to Central Asian States via Afghanistan boomed as there was no check and balance on Pakistani check posts because this duty fell under the Federal government which had given free hand to traders who even illegally smuggled several goods including puppy.⁶¹ But as soon as the relations between the Taliban and the U.S. ruined and their government was thrown, the gas-pipeline project was benished which not only ruined Pak-Afghan relations during the first regime of the Taliban, but also buried Pakistan's hopes of economic boom including its strategic plans in Afghanistan against India and more importantly its strategic depth dream. Before moving, it is vital to remind that when USSR invaded Afghanistan, the then Pakistani President Gen. Zia-Ul-Haq had shown full-fledge support to the U.S. and perhaps that was the reason why his American counterpart Ronald Reagan publicly declared him as the champion of the free world despites Zia's censorship on each and everything including all types of Media, freedom of speech and association. Similarly, Ronald Reagan also lifted sanctions imposed on Pakistan in 1970s when Pakistan was smuggling Uranium enrichment technology. Moreover, Pakistan was again certified of not embarking nuclear weapons in 1985 when the U.S Congress was going to impose sanctions under Pressler Amendments authored by Senator Larry Pressler. But as soon the U.S. had its job completed in 1989, the U.S. again imposed sanctions on Pakistan, right after one month of military coup in 1999, under the Pressler Amendment. The U.S. once again left its Afghan-war partner opened-mouth and went to its geopolitical player in South Asia, India. The U.S. also warned Pakistan of serious consequences if it did not withdraw its forces from Indian territory in Kargil which annoyed Musharraf the most. Apart from this, when the U.S. turned down to help its strategic partner and an allied member of CENTO and SEATO to help Pakistan in wars of 1965 and 1971 against India, this action once again dismayed. Additionally, the U.S. cultivated Taliban force what the U.S. had left trained and equipped now returned to Pakistan creating terrorism in the country and doing bombardments in schools and masjids killing

innocent citizens. More than 65,000 Pakistanis have been killed yet and 132 were killed within a few hours in Army Public School Peshawar.⁶² The U.S. State Secretary, Hillary Clinton herself acknowledged in an interview to the Fox News “the U.S. needed a force to fight in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union and to contain communism from being prevalent in the region. Thus, the U.S. decided to go to Pakistan and created a force of mujahidin, equipped them with stinger missiles and anything else to fight the Soviets inside Afghanistan and when the Soviet left and we were successful and then we, the U.S. said to the well trained and equipped Taliban “great, good bye!”. Who later on prevailed in both Pakistan and Afghanistan creating disturbance and mass destruction on a larger scale in the regions.⁶³ Pakistan still faces the dual Taliban crisis both inside and beyond the border due to the U.S. cultivated Taliban militia which after having ruined its relations with Pakistan during their first regime in Afghanistan, came to Pakistan in numerous groups and started terrorism and bombardments across the country which resulted in the killing of more than 80,000 Pakistanis and thousands of injuries. In short and long, the developments like the way the U.S. has kept turning down each time after it had achieved its interests like blocking the path of Communism, from being prevailed in South Asia, through Pakistan or to achieve its geopolitical interests. Similarly, the U.S. again used Pakistan in the war on terror due to what Pakistan went through huge socio-economic loss and still faces the socio-economic instability. The U.S. had always built better relations with its geopolitical partner, India, after having Pakistan done its job. But, the U.S. is not ashamed of any such action that thoroughly disappoints Pakistan. Additionally, the Taliban, who have been facilitated twice by Pakistan to form a government in Afghanistan so that Pakistan can fulfill its dream of strategic depth in Afghanistan. But the tricky Taliban have often been betraying Pakistan soon after they came into power. With such a harsh policy towards Pakistan, the Taliban are burying Pakistan’s dream of a strategic plan in future wars against India. Such disappointing developments have often mounted the disappointments and have critically dismayed Pakistan.

Conclusion

The rise of Taliban in 1994 and the speedy way they achieved power in 1996 is a complicated combination of domestic anarchy, geopolitical influences of the region, and the legacies of Sovietaf ghan war (1979-1989). The retreat of the post-Soviet forces left Afghanistan in a deep condition of anarchy and the inter-factional civil war of mujahideen factions consumed the country, mass crimes, and the loss of law and order. This vacuum provided fertile soil to the Taliban a movement based on Deobandi madrasas in Pakistan, dominated by Pashtun students (talibs) studying during the wave of refugees and indoctrinated with its ideology, to establish itself as bringers of peace and security as well as pure Islamic rule. The major influencing factors that helped the Taliban to gain power was the Afghans being weary of the war especially in Pashtun centralized southern such as Kandahar where the Taliban was initially given local support by promises to stop banditry, extortion, and warlord abuses. Logistical, financial and military support of Pakistan which supported its rapid military successes of the movement, as in 1994, it took control of Kandahar, then moved to take control of Herat and Kabul in 1995 and 1996, respectively. Saudi Arabia contributed further funding, and indirect benefits were received based on the existing U.S.-funded networks in the course of anti-Soviet jihad though no reliable reports come out to confirm that U.S. had funded the Taliban itself in the 1990s. The systematisation of the Islamic Emirate by the Taliban with Mullah Muhammad Omar became a dramatic turn to the extreme of enforcing Sharia, but the results of their governance failed the entire region and world as it served as a shelter to al-Qaeda terrorist, and resulted in instability. This eventually led to the

War on Terror by the U.S. after 2001, but it is a case of the ironical elegy: forces which molded the mujahideen ecosystem at an indirect level gave rise to a force that they ended up opposing. The Taliban case focuses on the role of foreign interventions, ethnic nationalities, and religious fundamentalism in coming together to reform weak states with long-term consequences to the Afghan society and international security. Further studies should center on refined comprehension of these endogenous and exogenous motions to implement policy in the reconstruction of post conflict societies.

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