Chapter 3

Afghan Crises in Post-Soviet Period

Afghanistan situated between Asia, the Middle East and former Soviet states, has historically filled the role of a ‘buffer state’. When the ‘Great Game’ was continuing between British India and Russia, Afghanistan entered British suzerainty as a buffer against Russia and obtained both cash and weapons from the British. After the Anglo-Russian Convention on Afghanistan, Persia and Tibet in 1907, the struggle for supremacy for this land declined. However, during the Cold War era, this land of Afghans regained its historical strategic significance and the United States and Soviet Union poured aid into the Afghan State. The Soviet Union became the major aid provider. Aid enabled the state to expand its organisation, yet not much attempt was made for social transformation of the countryside. Rather than try to penetrate the countryside and govern it, the Afghan state continued to pursue a strategy of encapsulating traditional local institutions.

The legitimacy of Afghan state was at all times shaky (Saikal and Maley 1991: 9-32). The state remained divided into the tribal groups and the feeling of national integration could not emerge. The political elite did not rule the people of Afghanistan by representing them but by force so; whenever the tribal chiefs found an opportunity to become independent they revolted against the ruling elite. The present chapter probes the intra-mujahideen struggle for power after the Soviet withdrawal which ultimately resulted in the emergence of Taliban. It further identifies the factors that resulted in their decline leading to the Bonn Accord. It examines the causes which transformed a buffer state into a weak and finally a failed state. The interest and role of regional and global players in Afghanistan as existed during the Taliban period has also been reviewed.

3.1 Soviet Entrenchment and its Withdrawal

In the months following the Saur Revolution of April 27, 1978, the USSR, reluctant to see the disintegration of a Communist regime on its doorstep increased aid to the Afghan government. A friendship treaty signed by the Taraki government and the USSR in 1978 prompted the USA and other Western States to begin actively supporting the various resistance groups that eventually came together and were called ‘the mujahideen’ (‘fighters in a holy war’). These are the same ‘mujahideens’
which have had later turned against their mentors - the USA and have raised arms against the USA itself. The United States ended aid to the Afghanistan government in February 1979, after ambassador Adolph Dubs, who had been taken hostage by Maoist guerrillas, was killed in a rescue mission. The Afghan state was now totally within the sphere of influence of Soviet Union, as it had been in the British sphere from 1879 to 1919. Most Western advisory and aid personnel left the country while thousands of Soviet advisers poured into the country (Bradsher 1983: 90). The Afghans government under the sole control of Khalq - itself increasingly dominated by Hafizullah Amin - tried to carry out a revolutionary transformation of Afghan society by decree and terror. This programme accelerated the disintegration of the ill-prepared state apparatus; the government’s dwindling control in turn encouraged larger segments of the population to revolt. The refusal of Amin to moderate his policies or seek coalition partners alienated the Soviet backers, as their regional security calculations were being destabilized by the decay of the army and state that they had funded. A Soviet supported plan to replace Amin with a Taraki-Karmal coalition failed in September 1979. Amin had Taraki killed and made overtures to the United States and Pakistan (Raja 1988: 186-193).

The army and administration of the state seemed headed for collapse, as insurgents operated from bases in Pakistan. With the inclination of Amin towards the United States, the Brezhnev Politburo feared that the United States would try to install a pro-American government in Kabul with Pakistani assistance (Garthoff 1985: 927-931). This misinterpretation was a classic “enemy image” often generated in a security dilemma. The United States and Pakistan, fearful of Soviet expansion into Afghanistan were giving no thought to a coup or military incursion there. On the contrary, the Soviet leaders, however, believed that only pre-emptive action could stop the collapse of the Afghan state and eliminate the opportunity for American expansion.

Reflecting the nineteenth century tactics of the British and Russian empires, the Soviets carried out a defensively motivated aggressive act. As Garthoff viewed “The Soviet leaders decided to intervene militarily in Afghanistan not because they were unwilling to keep it as a buffer, but precisely because they saw no other way to ensure that it would remain a buffer” (Garthoff 1985: 928). Finally in December 1979 Soviets sent a “limited contingent” of troops to take control of Afghanistan under directions from their President Leonid A. Brezhnev and his close associates. With
this, Afghanistan entered into a new phase of lawlessness and tyranny which had no limits.

After the Soviet intervention in 1979, Afghanistan became the battleground for the two superpowers – the USA and the USSR. Through the decades of eighties they poured far more resources into Afghanistan in conflict than they had ever devoted to cooperation for its development. Both the superpowers engaged in the intense endgame of the Cold War, supplied sophisticated weapons and massive quantities of cash into every social network they could recruit in this still impoverished country. The war changed social structures, as the traditional landed elite gave place to new power holders: the commanders.

Until the mid-1980s the Soviets virtually controlled the Afghan state structure but this was costing them heavily. By the time Mikhail Gorbachev became Soviet President in March 1985, it had become clear that propping up the People’s Democratic party of Afghanistan (PDPA) government in Afghanistan was a long term and costly endeavour. Gorbachev desired to have cooperative relations with the United States to free him to pursue domestic reforms. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan all of Gorbachev’s attempts to organise negotiations to create a more acceptable government failed. With no available outcome Soviets agreed to withdraw their troops under the Geneva Accords, signed on April 14, 1988. Withdrawal of troops was finally completed in February 1989.

Massive amount of economic aid and weapons supplied in Afghanistan by the United States of America and the Soviet Union and other regional powers during the eighties made this buffer state of the past a hot-bed of prolonged conflict during the nineties. After the Soviet withdrawal the regional powers that had supported the mujahideen no longer shared a common objective of expelling the Soviet troops, and their differences with the United States and amongst themselves led them to pursue divergent strategies. With the decline in military pressure the mujahideen were less dependent on outside supplies than in the past. Thus, they began to pursue varying individual and group interests, giving rise to ethnic claims and an increase in smuggling and drug trade. On, the other side, to defend his power, Najibullah excessively used Soviet aid to build up military forces outside the normal chain of command, creating a patchwork of tribal and ethnic militias with competing goals.
3.2 Struggle for Power after the Soviet Withdrawal

The withdrawal of Soviet troops between May 15, 1988, and February 15, 1989 reduced the military pressure on the mujahideen. USA expected that after the withdrawal of Soviet troops Afghan government under Najibullah would quickly fall. But, this did not happen as Najibullah played the nationalist card, while using the Soviet aid to play of his rivals' one against the other. During the years he remained in power, Najibullah took a number of steps to make the government more popular retreating from the earlier communist ideology and accepting the Islamic identity.

A new constitution was adopted in November 1987 by a loya jirga in which the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan reverted to its earlier name, the Republic of Afghanistan. This constitution was further amended in 1990. 1989 brought the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and 1990 the implementation of widespread economic and political reforms throughout the region and the Soviet Union. Najibullah sensed the dwindling Soviet support so in 1990 he moved away from Marxist toward an Islamic nationalist identity by convening a loya jirga, replacing key government ministers, and changing the name of the PDPA to Hezb-i-Watan (Homeland Party). Najibullah renounced Marxism-Leninism, the monopoly of power, and socialism in favour of Islam, democracy, and a market economy.

The state apparatus of Afghanistan however was far too weak to support genuine liberalisation, to say nothing of democratisation. The strings of real power were being increasingly controlled by the presidential office headed by Najibullah. Unable to create an effective, modern military, the government moved away from a bureaucratic chain of command toward a system based on brokerage, in which the state pays powerful leaders to supply troops from among their followings (Tilly 1990: 29, 53). Najibullah relied increasingly on heavily armed qawm-based militias rather than on the regular armed forces. Gradually, these militias evolved into powerful forces, ready to change sides but for a price. Meanwhile, mujahideen with continuous foreign aid were able to capture large parts of Afghanistan. But, the fragmentation of the political and military structures of the resistance prevented the mujahideen from turning local victories into a national one.

The uncompromising attitude of the mujahideen aggravated the Afghan crisis that transformed into a civil war between Islamic fundamentalism and the Najibullah’s government. While Najibullah made continuous efforts to consolidate his
position, the mujahideen declared a “free Muslim state” under the Afghan Interim Government (AIG) formed in February 1989 with Imam Rasul Sayaff as Prime Minister. The aim of the mujahideen was to topple Najibullah, but this did not happen and Dr. Najibullah survived for more than two years in his office.

The mujahideen were unable to defeat the Najibullah regime until April 1992 for two major reasons. First, the Soviets continued to provide extensive support to the regime. Even after the withdrawal of Soviet troops, their monetary support continued ranging between $250 million to $300 million per month (Matxis 1990: 3). The second remarkable reason for the continuation of the Afghan conflict was the inability of the Afghan resistance to mount a credible alternative. The Afghan Interim Government (AIG) could not sustain and was a failure since its inception, due to the perpetual bickering of the Peshawar party leaders who were its primary participants. The Shia minority and the major resistance commanders inside Afghanistan were not involved in the AIG. The AIG ultimately split in late 1989, divided by internecine violence between the forces of Hekmatyar and Massoud.

For many of the fighters and commanders, the personal obligation (farz-e' ain) of jihad ended with the Soviet withdrawal. Some leaders pursued economic opportunities, especially in opium production and the drug trade; while others elaborated independent political strategies and got engaged in struggles for local power. Without the unifying factor of jihad, nationalist resentments also grew against Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which had aided the struggle for their specific interests and now tried to control the outcome.

The international supporters of the resistance, who were desperate to displace Najibullah, tried to reshape mujahideen into a conventional military force led by a political alliance that would pose a genuine political alternative to Kabul. But, the mujahideen, expert in guerrilla warfare, lacked the necessary discipline and cohesiveness essential for successful conventional warfare. The meltdown of Soviet threat brought the regional rather than global considerations to the fore, which in turn incited divisions amongst the international supporters as well as mujahideen themselves.

Pakistan’s military saw the possibility of gaining “strategic depth” against India by planting a friendly Islamic regime in Kabul, whereas the United States wished to replace Najibullah with a stable “moderate” regime. Iran and Saudi Arabia used the various mujahideen forces as proxies for their rivalry. These states developed
links to emerging regional – ethnic alliances within Afghanistan. The Soviet Union and the Afghan regime of Najibullah, too, engaged mujahideen leaders in direct or indirect negotiations to incorporate them in some transitional arrangement. Commanders and party leaders tactfully manoeuvred on these rivalries to increase their independence, frustrating the external powers’ designs as local strongmen have often frustrated the policies of the central state. This led to continual conflict amongst the various mujahideen factions. Afghanistan was a seething cauldron of emotions but no one had a solution to resolve its problems.

During the early nineties anarchy prevailed in Afghanistan as social as well as economic conditions became from bad to worse. Even at a time when the collapse of Najibullah approached, the mujahideen remained as fragmented along ethno-linguistic, tribal sectarian and personality lines as ever. The leaders of the seven main Sunni Islamic groups (Table 3.1), which were based in Pakistan, had failed to agree on a common political platform and same was the case with the minority Shiite Islamic groups, which had their base in Iran. In 1989 Tehran had forced all the Shia groups into one umbrella organisation known as Hezb-i-Wahdat (Unity Party), but even then their differences persisted within the party.

Most groups functioned as fighting militias within specific localities from which their leaders originated and got the support on the basis of ethnic or tribal lines. The problem was further aggravated as most of the leaders got support from rival international patrons. Prominent one among them were Gulbuddin Hekmatyar assisted by Pakistan’s military intelligence (ISI) with the view that the government under his leadership would help Islamabad to fulfil their regional interests; Abdul-Rab al Rasul Sayyaf was strongly backed by Saudi Arabia whose agenda was to disseminate its primarily anti Iranian Wahhabi Islam; Abdul Ali Mazari, who headed the pro Iranian Hezb-e-Wahdat, and who after his assassination by the Taliban in 1995 was replaced by Abdul Karim Khalili, acted according to the wishes of Iran (Saikal 1998: 30-31). Throughout the summer of 1991 the UN attempted to mediate, but all its efforts were in vain as the various parties were not even ready to meet together, let alone agree to any settlement.

After the disintegration of Soviet Union the Najibullah’s government was orphaned, which forced him to announce on March 18, 1992, that he would leave office as soon as transitional authority was formed. Fearing that the state would totally disintegrate, the UN pressurised the various parties to reach a settlement. General
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party*</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Ideology</th>
<th>Headquarters Staff</th>
<th>Commanders</th>
<th>International links</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NIFA</strong></td>
<td>Sayyid Ahmad Gailani.</td>
<td>Traditionalist-nationalist</td>
<td>Leader's family.</td>
<td>Tribal khans; some of their educated sons.</td>
<td>Weak; some US conservatives.</td>
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<td>National Islamic</td>
<td>Spiritual Leader (pir)</td>
<td>(Royalist). Most pro-Western</td>
<td>Western educated Pashtuns of old regime</td>
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<td>Front of Afghanistan</td>
<td>of Qadiri Sufi order.</td>
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<td>(Mahaz-i-Milli-yi</td>
<td>Arab lineage traced</td>
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<td>Islimai-yi Afghanistan)</td>
<td>to prophet. Married into royal clan.</td>
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<td><strong>ANLF</strong></td>
<td>Hazrat Sibghatullah Mujaddidi.</td>
<td>Traditionalist-nationalist.</td>
<td>Leader's family.</td>
<td>Too few to analyse; probably khans and some ulama.</td>
<td>Weak</td>
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<td>Afghan National</td>
<td>Cousin of executed Pir of</td>
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<td>Western educated Pashtuns of old regime</td>
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<td>Liberation Front</td>
<td>Naqshbandi Sufi Order.</td>
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<td>(Jabha-yi Milli-yi</td>
<td>Long-time conservative</td>
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<td>Islimai-yi Afghanistan)</td>
<td>Islamic activist.</td>
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<td>Religious lineage from</td>
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<td>India</td>
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<td><strong>HAR</strong></td>
<td>Mawlawi Muhammad Nabi</td>
<td>Islamic traditionalist</td>
<td>Leader's family.</td>
<td>Privately educated ulama, mullahs. Mostly Pashtuns, some Uzbeks. Most Tajiks left for Jamiat</td>
<td>Weak. Close to one weak Islamic part in Pakistan</td>
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<td>Harkat-I Inqilab-I</td>
<td>Muhammadi. Traditional alim,</td>
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<td>Western educated Pashtuns from Logar.</td>
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<td>Islami (Movement of the Islamic Revolution)</td>
<td>head of madrasa. Ahmaddai Pashtun of Logar. Member of parliament under New Democracy.</td>
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<td><strong>HIH</strong></td>
<td>Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.</td>
<td>Radical Islamist. Views</td>
<td>State-educated intelligentsia; mainly (not only) Pashtuns from outside tribal society</td>
<td>Favour by Paksitan ISI, Pakistani and Arab Islamists.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hizb-I Islami</td>
<td>Former student at Faculty of Engineering, Kabul Univ.Kharruti Pashtun from detralised settlement in North</td>
<td>Afghan society (not just communist regime) as un-Islamic. Favoured party domination</td>
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<td>(Islamic Party,</td>
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<td>Hekmatyar group)</td>
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<td>Hizb-I Islami (Islamic Party, Khalis group)</td>
<td>Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani. Lecturer at Sharia Faculty of Kabul Univ. Trained at al-Azhar. Tajik from Badakhshan.</td>
<td>Professor Abd al-Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf. Lecturer at Sharia Faculty of Kabul Univ. Trained at al-Azhar, Kharruti Pashtun from Paghman.</td>
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<td>Mawlawi Yunis Khalis. Militant alim educated in British India. From Khugiani Pashtun tribe of Nangarhar.</td>
<td>Moderate Islamist. Views Afghan society as corrupted but Muslim</td>
<td>Radical Islamist, Salafi. Very anti-Shia</td>
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<tr>
<td>State-trained intelligentsia and ulama from Pashtun tribal families linked to the leader.</td>
<td>Best and most commanders. State-trained Tajik (and some Uzbek) intelligentsia, including ulama; Tajik Sufis; Alikozai tribal ulama of Qandahar.</td>
<td>Opportunist, responding to leader’s command of Arab funds. Very few, but very well funded and armed. Base in leader’s home town, Paghman.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some state-trained intelligentsia, but mostly militant tribal ulama. All Pashtun.</td>
<td>Some links to ISI and Arabs; intermittent. Some top commanders favoured by US</td>
<td>Favoured by Saudis, other wealthy Arab donors from the Persian Gulf.</td>
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<td>Well supplied by ISI and CIA because of high body counts.</td>
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Dostum had now deserted the government and along with the northern militias under his command joined Ahmad Shah Massoud’s forces. As the rival forces battled for the control of Kabul, party leaders, excluding Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, finally reached agreement on April 26, 1992, and announced the Peshawar Accords. As per the agreement for two months Mujaddidi would be acting president, he would be followed by Rabbani for four months. At the end of the six-month interim period, the government would hold a shura to choose a government for the next eighteen months, after which elections would be held. The acting president would be answerable to a council composed of the leaders of mujahideen parties. Massoud was appointed the minister of defence. An interim government with 51 member council led by Sibghatullah Mojaddidi took office on April 28, 1992, and proclaimed the establishment of the Islamic State of Afghanistan (Rubin 1995b: 133). But, the Peshawar Agreement could never be fully implemented because of Hekmatyar’s obstructionism, which rendered the Agreement totally ineffective.

New international diplomatic efforts initiated by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia resulted in the Islamabad Agreement of March 7, 1993. The agreement, among other shortcomings, was internally contradictory. The agreement declared two rivals Burhanuddin Rabbani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as president and prime minister respectively. Even this could not bring peace in Afghanistan. Numerous peace efforts, pursued by various mujahideen leaders, the Organisation of the Islamic conference and the United Nations produced no result. The involvement of Pakistan, United States, Iran and Saudi Arabia made the situation highly complex. They wanted Afghanistan to be peaceful but were also unable to abandon their regional interest thus they also remained preoccupied with its internal affairs. Afghanistan’s continued violence especially frustrated Pakistan because it prevented its aspirations to trade and influence the newly independent states of Central Asia. Despite having continuous support of Pakistan, Hekmatyar could not seize Kabul and provide stability to Afghanistan, thus becoming a liability for them. This prompted the ISI in the summer of 1994 to shift their support to a newly created alternative: the Taliban militia. The arrival of the Taliban on the Afghan stage finally marked the end of the period of intra-mujahideen civil war.
3.3 Ascendance of Taliban

The formation of Taliban is considered to be the brainchild of Pakistan. The continuous instability in Afghanistan with no sign of settling down promoted the Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto – elected in October 1993 and her interior minister Major General (Retired) Naseerullah Babar to place a friendly government in Kabul and have a secured trade route to Central Asia. Naseerullah Babar a Pashtun military man, PPP loyalist had served both Bhutto and her father as principal adviser on Afghanistan. In the government of Bhutto, Babar had the confidence of both the prime minister and the army, thus occupying a unique position of power (Davis 1998: 44). Babar influenced the government to move away from its reliance on Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as an agent of Pakistan’s influence, a policy that he had begun in 1974 as Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto’s governor of the NWFP.

Babar is reported to have argued that Afghanistan would not be a stable or united country for a long time. Rather than rely on the dubious claims of Hekmatyar that he would take over Kabul and stabilize Afghanistan, Pakistan should deal directly with whatever powers existed on the ground to facilitate the overland trade with Central Asia, something which would boost the country’s flagging economy. If the route from Peshawar through Kabul and the Salang Highway to Tashkent was blocked by war in Kabul, Pakistan should seek to open the western route, from Quetta through Kandhar and Herat to Turkmenistan.

In June 1994, Bhutto’s cabinet decided to proceed with building rail and road links to Central Asia. In September 1994, Babar himself travelled to Central Asia via Kandhar and Herat to negotiate the transit of Pakistani convoy that would leave in October (Reuters 1994). On October 29, 1994, on an ‘experimental’ basis a convoy of thirty trucks laden with consumer goods, foodstuffs, and medical supplies left Quetta. The convoy was organised by National Logistics Cell – the same military unit that had been in charge of supplying the mujahideen with weapons, and escorted by Colonel Imam, one of the ISI officers most prominent in Pakistan’s Afghanistan policy.

Between Babar’s September visit to Afghanistan and the departure of the first ‘experimental’ convoy, the Taliban had done their first military activity. But, this attracted little attention either from the media or from the Kabul government. The media was busy covering the fight amongst the commanders to control Kabul and the
The government in Kabul was struggling to survive the attacks by these commanders. On October 12, 1994, a force of some 200 Taliban militia, divided into three groups, assaulted the border district of Spin Boldak, a sprawling trucking stop-over point opposite Chaman. The rout of the Hezb-i- Islami garrison under Mullah Akhtar Jan by reportedly well organised Taliban was all over in around two hours. Diplomatic sources also claimed later that the attackers were supported by the artillery fire from across the border (Davis 1998: 45).

The seizure of Spin Boldak was the sign of an impending shift of forces in Afghanistan. Although for government in Kabul, struggling to survive, the fall of southern district attracted little attention. But, for the squabbling Mujahideen warlords— Mullah Naqib, Amir Lalai, Sarkateb and Mansur Achakzai it came as a clarion alarm. Following the fall of Spin Boldak tensions rose immediately between the Taliban and the Kandhar commanders. The latter claimed that the Taliban were being supported by the Pakistani authorities and feared their real motive. Yet, the feuding warlords did not even try to resolve their differences and present a united front. Despite the efforts of Ghaffar Akhundzadeh of Helmand to mediate between the two sides, tensions finally led to open conflict over the convoy incident, marking the presence of Taliban on the global media stage.

On October 20, 1994, few days before the convoy was to leave Quetta en route for Turkmenistan via Kandhar and Herat and only a week after the fall of Spin Boldak, Babar headed a group of Islamabad- based ambassadors from the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Italy, and Korea on a flight from Quetta to Kandhar and Herat. This effort of Pakistan was to garner support for a US $300 million project to upgrade the trans-Afghan highway further underscored Babar’s foreign policy concerns and his very personal commitment to Central Asian trade. Here, it seems that Pakistan had tried to show the prevailing anarchy in Afghanistan to the diplomats and seek their silent permission in the support of Taliban, because no infrastructure developmental project could be undertaken till the Afghanistan remained disturbed. So, Pakistan might have projected Taliban as an alternative force which could provide peace in Afghanistan.

The convoy of trucks started from October 29, 1994, but its arrival in Kandhar was delayed: on November 2, it was halted midway by the fighters of Mansur Achakzai at his base at Takht-e-Pul, 35 kilometres outside Kandhar. The incident was not a usual banditry act, rather a political ransom on the part of commanders, angry
over what they understood to Pakistani support for the newly emerging force. Conditions for convoy’s release – put forward to the Pakistani authorities by Kandhar commanders Mansur Achakzai, Amir Lalai and a Sayyaf commander, Ustaz Halim – were that permits should be issued permitting free movement across the frontier by their supporters; and most importantly the ISI and the Frontier Corps should cease supporting the Taliban (Newsline 1994).

An attempt to negotiate through a tribal jirga sent to Takht-e Pul failed, leading the matters to be resolved violently. Taliban reinforcements who had infiltrated from across the border armed with new Kalashnikovs freed the convoy on November 3. Then abruptly they entered the Kandhar city, to rout the warlord forces. At this crucial movement, Naqib, who commanded the most powerful force of an estimated 2,500 men did not resist. Those who did – Mansur, Lalai, Halim and Sarkateb – were swept away in two days fighting. With little resistance Taliban dispersed the tribesman and on November 5, 1994, captured the two main strategic targets, the airport and the governor’s residence in Kandhar (Davis 1995b: 315-321).

By rescuing the convoy of trucks and taking control of Kandhar Taliban rose to the level of being considered in diplomatic circles as an emerging alternative force in Afghanistan and attracted the global attention. Within a short span of three weeks a hitherto unknown force had seized control of the country’s second city and was estimated to have grown from several hundred to some 2,500-3000 disciplined motivated fighters.

Although, the mentor and promoter of Taliban – Pakistan was continually helping them logistically, economically and through operation and planning, but kept on declining the fact. As international and domestic pressure mounted on Pakistan to explain its position, Ms. Bhutto issued the first formal denial of any Pakistani backing for the Taliban in February 1995. During her visit to Manila she stated “We have no favourites in Afghanistan and we do not interfere in Afghanistan” (The Nation 1995). Later she said that Pakistan could not stop new recruits from crossing the border to join the Taliban. “I do not stop them. I can stop them from re-entering but most of them have families here”, she said. “We can’t just shut down the schools [madrassas] and allow these people to spread all across the country. We would rather [wish that] they be confined. Because of the Afghan war, people were taught that to be a Muslim means to spread Islam by armed struggle”, she added (Dawn 1995).
To suggest, as senior Islamabad officials including the Prime Minister were doing, that Pakistan had no hand in facilitating, if not actually planning the events of Spin Boldak, convoy rescue and ultimately the Taliban sweeping into Kandhar city is to beggar belief. Reports of artillery support and cross-border assistance in the capture of Spin Boldak were accorded considerable credibility by Western diplomats in Quetta and Islamabad. These suspicions were shared by warlords themselves, who were convinced of official Pakistani involvement soon after Spin Boldak fell, unsurprisingly given the location of the town on the border itself and the size of the operation.

3.4 Consolidation of Taliban

Since their emergence Taliban presented themselves as religious students who were fed up with the post-communist struggle for Kabul and the lawlessness in the whole country. Once Taliban imposed order in Kandhar, they quickly found popular support in the south-western Afghanistan. Taliban moved further into central and eastern Afghanistan, disrupting the stalemate that had prevailed since 1992. The religious scholars asked or bribed drug barons, warlords, and militia commanders to surrender or leave, and many did so, perhaps unwilling to raise arms against the true believers of Islam. The Taliban also fought some successful skirmishes in 1995. After taking Spin Boldak, Kandhar and Lashkargah by January 1995 through a combination of methods they drove towards Kabul and Herat.

After seizing Lashkargah in January 1995, Taliban were openly denouncing all Mujahideen factions as being as rouge as each other. By now the movement had undergone a fundamental shift. From being a provincial force that had successfully imposed peace and security in Kandhar, it had now become a crusade determined to establishing Sharia law and disarming of mujahideen ‘criminals’ across the country. The military characteristic of this force was well apparent. It marked a significant break with anything seen earlier on the Afghan battlefield. Tactically the Taliban operated with a flexibility that hinged on a notably efficient communications and command-control network. All this was at startling variance with the jihad-era warfare of Afghanistan’s tribal south of which Taliban chiefs had been a part – a conflict based on the guerrilla art of warfare relying on hit-and-run, organisationally fragmented and seldom if ever fought to conclusion. Exactly what strategic planning
lay behind this shift, who made them and when, remains, like so much else about Taliban, obscured in the secrecy surrounding the 22-member ruling shura.

By early March of 1996, the Taliban army had established the three pronged structure that was to characterise its further growth. The forces were composed of madrassa youth, the real Taliban; former jihadi fighters whose commanders found it expedient or profitable to climb aboard the bandwagon; and former communist regime officers. It is perhaps remarkable that the militia comprising of both white and blue collar man was very well integrated in army without a degree of friction coming to fore.

Significantly, at around this time the upper echelons of ISI started to look at Taliban as an alternative – whose traditional Pashtun candidate to rule Kabul has long been Hekmatyar. For much of 1994, ISI after being ‘cleaned-up’ in 1993, under considerable American pressure had retreated into a shell as far as Afghanistan was concerned. The military stalemate inside Afghanistan explains the reluctance of ISI to start any new policy initiatives. The ISI were initially more sceptical than the government about the success of Taliban. So, in 1994 while General Babar and the Jamiat-e Ulema-Islam pushed for the support to the Taliban, the ISI took back seat, preferring to watch developments rather than act prematurely in supporting the Taliban. But, by January 1995 ISI was taking a growing interest in Taliban. By then it was entirely clear that the Durrani- dominated Taliban had succeeded in achieving legitimacy, popularity and a momentum of victory in the heartlands of Pashtun Afghanistan far beyond anything Hekmatyar, a Ghilzai Pashtun from northern Afghanistan, could even have hoped to achieve.

By March 1995, the Taliban controlled about one-third of Afghanistan and were on the outskirts of Kabul. They defeated the Shia Hezb-i-Wahadat and killed the Wahdat leader Ali Mazari, reportedly committing atrocities against some of the captured soldiers. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar evacuated his position south of Kabul and fled east before the Taliban advance. But, Massoud’s government soldiers drove the Taliban back from the capital. Massoud was for the first time in complete control of the capital with all his enemies pushed back beyond rocket range. For the first time since early 1992 Kabul was no longer a city under siege (Asiaweek 1995). After the Kabul debacle in March, Taliban advance towards Herat was obstructed in April, and in May 1995 they clashed with Iranian troops in Nimruz. Hindered by poor logistics and ammunition, the Taliban movement appeared to run out of steam. It prompted
some analysts to predict prematurely the end of Taliban expansion and even their
demise under the pressure of Pashtun tribal loyalties (Davis 1995a). Eventually, this
did not happen.

The summer of 1995 brought in a slowdown in the offensive activities of
Taliban. In military parlance it was a breathing space that allowed for consolidation
and a marked improvement in the Taliban’s capacity to wage subsequent war. During
this lull duration focus was on improving and acquiring logistics. Due attention was
also given on recruiting and training of volunteers. Training was stepped up with a
greater emphasis on mobility, while logistics were improved by the acquisition of
large numbers of new pick-up trucks from across the Pakistan border. Pakistan had
also been trying for several months then to broker an agreement between the Taliban
and General Dostum. The quasi-alliance with Dostum led to the arrival of Uzbek
airforce technicians in July at Kandhar air base. But, this did not lead to any agreement
between Dostum and Taliban (Davis 1998: 60).

After consolidating themselves, Taliban resumed their drive north in late
summer. They captured Herat in September 1995, forcing Ismail Khan to flee to Iran.
With the victory of Herat, Taliban was in control of more than 50 percent of
Afghanistan. With Dostum powerfully positioned in north and the Rabbani-Massoud
government increasingly isolated in Kabul, the Taliban pushed on Kabul again. By
November 1995 they had all but cut off the city, yet by the end of the year Massoud
had successfully repulsed Taliban back from Kabul once again (Magnus 1997: 111).

In February 1996, Pakistan hosted a meeting between Hekmatyar, General
Dostum and the Taliban in Islamabad to forge an alliance. By this time Taliban had
garnered some assistance from Osama bin Laden’s Al’-Qaeda group. Pakistan failed
to persuade the Taliban that if they linked up with Dostum their credibility would be
much higher in Western capitals. Even at this stage Taliban failed to share power with
their rivals. It seems that the ethnicity of two prominent officers dealing with the
Taliban – army chief General Abdul Waheed and the head of Military Intelligence
Lieutenant-General Ali Kuli Khan both Pashtuns – may have been instrumental in the
Taliban’s denial to share power with Hekmatyar a Ghilzai Pashtun and Dostum an
Uzbek. But this assumption still needs confirmation.

It can be so presumed because military appears to have decided by the
summer of 1995 that the Taliban were the only possible alternative for Pakistan’s own
strategic interest in Afghanistan, especially as President Rabbani appeared to be
getting too close to Pakistan’s rivals – Russia, Iran and India. Another major factor was the ISI’s reluctance to trust Rabbani’s Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud who now controlled Kabul, but had continuously differed with the ISI since the 1980s.

After the Taliban’s decline to share power with Hekmatyar and Dostum, both of them along with Mojaddidi and Karim Khalili (the new leader of Hezb-i-Wahdat) formed a new alliance called the Supreme Coordination Council. Once allied, they started pressurising Rabbani to step down from the post of President. Hekmatyar realising the Pakistan’s support continuously towards the Taliban, moderated his position early in the year finally joining the government as prime minister in June 1996.

In August 1996 Taliban forces defeated Hekmatyar’s forces in Paktia capturing his main base at Spin Shighar near the Pakistan border. From Paktia, the Taliban pushed into Nangarhar province and seized Jalalabad on September 11, 1996. Without pausing for breath, flying columns took over Laghman and Kunar provinces north of Nangarhar. Then on September 24, 1996, Taliban forces took over Sarobi – a district centre on the Kabul-Jalalabad highway 75 km east of Kabul and traditionally a Hekmatyar’s Hizb-e-Islami stronghold. Taliban easily vanquished Sarobi with little fighting. Without halting or waiting to regroup they moved towards Kabul.

Massoud’s forces never recovered from the debacle at Sarobi. On September 25, they attempted to establish a last-ditch line of defence at Pul-e Charkhi on the eastern edge of the Kabul plain. With no hope of able to retain Kabul, Massoud, in council with Rabbani, Hekmatyar and other senior commanders at the Armoured Division head quarters at Khari Khanah on the northern edge of Kabul, gave the order for a general withdrawal from the capital. Taliban entered Kabul the next day.

After the Taliban got control of Kabul on September 27, 1996, they committed heinous crimes in the name of Islam. Soon after capturing Kabul they seized Muhammad Najibullah from the UN compound and executed him. Outflanked by Taliban and uncertain of their support, Massoud, Dostum and Khalilli formed a shaky Northern Alliance (Goodson 2001: 78). After the takeover of Kabul, Taliban moved towards north. Early 1997 saw the Taliban still south of the Salang Tunnel, the entrance to which was blocked by Massoud to prevent a Taliban breakthrough in the north. In May 1997, Taliban tried to takeover Mazar-i-Sharif with the assistance of Dostum’s Lieutenant Abul Malik. Malik had revolted against Dostum and supported the Taliban, forcing Dostum to flee abroad. Just four days after the Taliban taking
control, a popular uprising in Mazar-i-Sharif led to massacre of the Taliban vanguard there. More than four thousand Taliban troops were eventually killed, most after having been captured. This occurred as Malik has again shifted his loyalties toward Northern Alliance (Goodson 2001: 80).

After the debacle in Mazar-i-Sharif, the Taliban garrison in Pul-i-Khumri retreated to Kunduz, where it took control of the airport long enough to be reinforced (Rashid 1997: 20-21). By November 1997, Dostum had returned to control Mazar-i-Sharif, forcing Malik to go into exile. Throughout 1997, UN’s desultory efforts to negotiate peace through the “Six plus Two” framework - that include Afghanistan’s six contiguous neighbours plus the US and Russia - made no headway. After the losses of the summer and fall of 1997, Taliban resorted to a new approach of restricting the supply of food aid to the regions that were not under their control. Thus they did not let the supply of food-aid reach the starving people of central Afghanistan. Taliban seemed to have prepared well for their summer campaign that was partially financed by Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, to once again buy off local commanders. The Taliban intended their summer campaign to be their major thrust to bring the war to an end.

By the summer of 1998, the Taliban had moved eastward from their western headquarters in Herat, through Faryab and Jouzan provinces with the motive of finally taking over Mazar-i-Sharif. The Taliban troops very well supported by tanks and armoured personnel carriers, seized Faryab in July 1998. They moved forward in full swing and overran Dostum’s headquarters at Shiberghan in early August. Mazar-i-Sharif fell a week later followed by Bamiyan in September 1998. In both the towns Taliban committed atrocities and banned the entrance of outside observers. More than eight thousand non-combatants had been reported killed in and around the two cities by the end of September 1998. Thousand more were reported to have been internally displaced as Taliban had perpetrated to ethnic cleansing of the Hazara population. With the Taliban victories of Bamiyan and Mazar-i-Sharif; and Massoud pulling back from his headquarters town of Taloqan, Taliban got control of more than 90 percent of the country. By the autumn of 1998, only Massoud was left as a significant rival of the Taliban and it appeared that the Afghan conundrum might finally be drawing to a close.
Figure 3.1: Taliban Conquest of Afghanistan

- Kandahar falls November 1994
- Talibam captures Spin Boldak October 12, 1994
- Farah falls February 1995
- Nimroz falls February 1995
- Helmand falls January 1995
- Bamiyan falls September 1998
- Wardak falls February 1995
- Taliban captures Kabul September 27, 1996
- Taliban captures Taloqan September 5, 2000
- Taliban captures Mazar-e-Sharif August 8, 1998
- Badghis falls October 1996
- Herat falls September 1995
- Turkmenistan
- Tajikistan
- Pakistan
- Uzbekistan
International attention was also focused on Afghanistan, during this period, and it, too, peaked after the massacre in Mazar-i-Sharif. Social policies of the Taliban, especially their interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law as it pertains to the appropriate behaviour and activities of women in society, led to the marginalisation of the movement by most international actors.

3.5 The Endgame - Decline of the Taliban 1998-2001

By the end of 1998 Taliban controlled major portion of Afghanistan but were not ready to share power. They declined to form a broad based government that included representative of the northern minorities. Although, the Taliban had constituted the de-facto government of Afghanistan after they took over Kabul in 1996, yet they have had virtually no positive presence in the wider world. The tolerance and eventually their active participation in the increasingly lucrative opium growing and heroin production in Afghanistan, also served to isolate the regime of Taliban. The Taliban government was only recognised by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, but the rest of the world continued to recognise the Rabbani’s regime as the legitimate government of the country.

With the continuous efforts of UN mediator Lakhdar Brahimi, in March 1999, in Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan the Taliban agreed to share power with the Northern Alliance (or the United Front). But, almost immediately after the agreement the Taliban leader Mullah Omar Akhund backed away from the deal. An effort to revive the deal led to a meeting with the “Six plus Two” framework at Tashkent in mid-July, but it proved to be an abortive attempt, as the Taliban were preparing for a long drawn summer offensive. After the failure of these negotiations, the Taliban launched a major offensive on Massoud’s forces, with the objective of their annihilation. This did not happen and the ebb and flow of fighting continued throughout 1999.

In October 1999, UN mediator Lakhdar Brahimi resigned from his post, citing the unwillingness of the Afghan belligerents, especially the Taliban to pursue peace as an insurmountable obstacle to his job. During the same period, in a military political upheaval the Pakistani military headed by General Pervaiz Musharraf, ousted the Nawaz Sharif government. The outcome was a result of simmering disagreements between Musharraf and Sharif over Pakistan’s policy toward Kashmir and Afghanistan, after Sharif tried to curb the religious right following bloody sectarian
violence in early October, and after he attempted to sack Musharraf (Goodson 2000: 107-128).

To gain credibility and under due pressure from United States, Pakistan’s new government under Musharraf immediately tightened border controls with Afghanistan in order to crack down on smuggling. This resulted in inflation in wheat prices and sharp decline in the Afghan currency. In the subsequent years, especially after 9/11, Musharraf very tactfully led the West rely on his seriousness to resolve the Taliban issue, while covertly supporting them. With his two pronged approach Musharraf could continue to rule Pakistan for nine years. Even at a time when Pakistan was under extreme pressure to revert their support to Taliban after 9/11, Musharraf saved Pakistan being targeted by the US with two sided approach. On the one hand he supported the US in their war against evil, but as a bargain with the US he made arrangements that the Taliban leadership as well as hundreds of ISI officers and soldiers from the Frontier corps aiding the Taliban, now trapped in Kunduz could have a safe exit into Pakistan (Rashid 2008: 91).

In response to the restrictions imposed on Pakistan’s border, relations between the Taliban and Iran thawed. Iran, leaving aside the bitter past of 1998, when Taliban forces had invaded and killed the diplomats in Iran consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif, now softened its approach towards the Taliban. In late November 1999 the Afghan-Iranian border was reopened for trade at Islam Qala, west of Herat. By the time of drawing of curtains of 1999, amid a flurry of diplomatic activity Taliban had to a certain extent normalised its relations with Iran. The Taliban leadership was also trying to develop good ties with the new Pakistani regime. Their president Mullah Mohammad Rabbani headed high level visits to Pakistan in January and February 2000 to promote this effort. Northern Alliance president Burhanuddin Rabbani, alarmed by the budding relationship between Iran and the Taliban rushed to Iran in December 1999 to shore up that critical relationship.

The developments of the year 2000 prepared certain ground for the demise of Taliban, but no one had expected that their evacuation from Afghanistan would be sudden and catastrophic as it happened in 2001. Most prominent of the development of 2000 was that the sprouting ties between Taliban and Iran snapped prematurely, as the legendary Herati commander Ismail Khan escaped in February from Kandhar, where the Taliban had held him captive since 1997. His escape sparked an Iranian – backed effort to construct a more formidable Northern Alliance, including other
marginalised and exiled former leaders such as Abdul Rashid Dostum and Abdul Malik. Secondly, the Musharraf government in Pakistan openly provided its military support for the Taliban in their July-September campaign into the northeast. Pervaiz Musharraf was pursuing what Massoud described as “a suicidal policy of supporting terrorist” (Rashid 2008: 21). The Taliban with Pakistan’s support successfully squeezed the forces of Massoud out of Taloqan into a sliver of territory, and cutting of his supply line with Tajikistan.

The year 2000 ended with the Taliban in control of 90 to 97 percent of Afghan territory, but the remaining area was held fiercely by Massoud’s army. The country apparently appeared to be more unified than it had been at any point of time in the preceding two decades, but internally it was deeply fragmented. Russia was increasingly concerned by the amplified growth of Taliban, as these ‘students’ were exporting Islamic terrorism, especially in Chechnya and Central Asia. However, the Taliban’s success on the battlefield during the summer-autumn fighting season forced its neighbours like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to reconsider their chilly relations. Indeed, despite the official isolation imposed by the US and Russia, by early 2001 it was increasingly clear that the Taliban controlled almost all of Afghanistan, with Massoud bottled up in the Panjshir Valley and remote north-eastern Badakhshan and his Hazara allies isolated in the central highlands.

By 2000, the US-Taliban relations dipped to their lowest point. Afghanistan and more or less completely Pakistan also had become an incubator for Al’-Qaeda, because of the nexus between Islamic extremists and the army, both of which assented on Al’-Qaeda’s presence before 9/11. Americans had by now gradually comprehended that the Taliban and Al’-Qaeda were partners in creating an international army for terrorism based in Afghanistan, but were indolent in taking any quick action against this nexus. The Taliban’s success, assisted by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia’s ability to lavish massive support to the movement, was due largely to Washington’s silence during the decade of nineties.

During 1994 to 1996 the Clinton administration simply stood by, allowing Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to pursue their own protégés in Afghanistan, essentially because Washington viewed the Taliban as anti-Iranian pro-western. US had high hope that the Taliban would restore order to all of Afghanistan as they had done in Kandhar and other regions of the south. It was also prematurely presumed by the US federal narcotics agents based in Pakistan that the Taliban would bring an end to the
booming opium trade out of Afghanistan. Most importantly, and unrecognised at the
time, the Taliban promised to open doors for the construction of giant gas and oil
pipelines from Central Asia down through Afghanistan to Pakistan. The main
contender for that pipeline was an American-Saudi coalition of UNOCOL and
DELTA oil companies. As Rubin stated, “the Taliban’s “most” important function ....
Was to provide security for pipelines that would link the states of Central Asia to the
international market through Pakistan rather than through Iran” (Rubin 1997: 1-2, 6).

Instead of putting forward peace plans to end the civil war, the US State
Department openly backed the UNOCOL. The company even provided humanitarian
aid to the Taliban, while inviting Taliban delegation to the United States. The
Americans believe, rather naively, that a pipeline would bring peace between the
warring factions (Rashid 2000a). US policy regarding the Taliban shifted only in
1996, after the capture of Kabul. While Washington had hoped for national ‘peace’,
the Taliban takeover of Kabul resulted in the establishment of an obvious ‘moral’
police state in the capital, ethnic cleansing of the areas to its immediate north, and the
spread of violence in areas which had long been relatively quiet. Washington started
to distance itself from the Taliban, when the US media focused on the Taliban’s brutal·
policies toward women and Osama bin-Laden became the guest of Mullah Omar and
chose to stay near Kandhar airport in the autumn of 1996.

Although, Osama was wanted by the US, for his alleged involvement in the
June 1996 bombing of American barracks in Khobar Saudi-Arabia. The Clinton
administration did not plan any decisive strategic policy towards the region even after
the arrival of Osama bin-Laden in Kandhar. The CIA already considered Osama a
threat, still he was left alone to ingratiate himself with Mullah Omar by providing
money, fighters and ideological advice to the Taliban. Osama gathered the Arab
fighters of Soviet period still present in Afghanistan and Pakistan, enlisted more
militants from Arab countries, and established a new global terrorist infrastructure
called Al’-Qaeda.

In his strategic alliance with the Taliban, Osama received an entire country as
a base for his operations. In due course of time Al’-Qaeda took control of the training
camps in eastern Afghanistan which the ISI and Pakistani extremists had earlier run
for Kashmiri insurgents. These training camps started to train extremist groups who
intended to train in Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden successfully gathered around him
thousand of Islamic extremists and extended his operations around the world. His
main logistical support came from Pakistani extremist groups, who could provide the kinds of supplies and means of communication with the outside world not available in Afghanistan. This support base in Pakistan was to prove critical to Al’-Qaeda’s survival after 9/11. In return of availing the facilities in Afghanistan Osama funded some of Mullah Omar’s pet projects, such as building a grand mosque in Kandhar and constructing key roads. Until then, the Taliban had not considered America as an enemy and showed little understanding of world affairs. Slowly, influenced by the extremist views of Osama bin Laden, Taliban leaders began to imbibe the ideas of global jihad.

Just two year after the attack on American barracks, Osama launched another major attack on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, 1998, which killed 224 people and wounded nearly 5,000. Delayed retaliation of America by launching seventy five cruise missiles on training camps in eastern Afghanistan provided enough time for Al’-Qaeda members to escape. Some twenty-one people mostly Pakistani militants and several ISI trainers were killed.

The ineffectual US retaliation further emboldened Al’-Qaeda and convinced already paranoid Mullah Omar that Americans were scared of the Taliban. Washington now stepped up diplomatic pressure on the Taliban to hand over bin-Laden. In their meetings with the Taliban, US officials tried to drive a wedge between the Taliban and Al’-Qaeda and to persuade Pakistan to do the same – but nothing seemed to work. The Taliban were promised everything, including at times formal US recognition, if they handed over Osama bin-Laden. Al’-Qaeda struck again on October 12, 1998, attempting to sink the American destroyer USS Cole while it was taking on fuel in Aden’s harbour. Clinton administration did not openly blamed Osama bin Laden for this as it would have demanded retaliatory action on him. In fact, Washington had few viable options for retaliation after the firing of cruise missiles on training camps had proved to be a dismal failure (Rashid 2000b).

United States instead of taking any decisive action has continuously been trying to mobilise the international community through a series of UN resolutions, although Taliban was least concerned about these resolutions. In October 1999, the UN Security Council announced plans to impose sanctions on the Taliban if they did not turn Osama over to the US for his alleged involvement in terrorist activities, and sanctions were duly imposed in November 1999, following Taliban’s non compliance. In December 2000, UN Resolution 1333 imposed a complete arms ban on the Taliban
and closing of training camps, as well as a seizure of Taliban assets outside Afghanistan. The resolution was aimed at stopping Pakistan’s arms support to the Taliban. The Taliban reacted angrily, while Pakistan’s ISI put together the “Afghan Defence Council,” made up of forty Pakistani Islamic political parties, designed to resist UN pressure and register support for the Taliban. On July 30, 2001, as Islamabad continued to supply arms to the Taliban, the Security Council passed Resolution 1363, which authorised monitors on Afghanistan’s border to ensure that the UN arms embargo was enforced. The Taliban and their Pakistani supporters said they would kill any UN monitors who arrived.

By ideologically feeding the Taliban with extremist views, Osama bin-Laden had a clear strategy in mind: to isolate the Taliban from the outside world so that it would become even more dependent on Al’-Qaeda. The Taliban leadership would then have no choice but to defend Al’-Qaeda when greater US pressure was exerted once the attacks of US soil had taken place. While Osama had a very clear strategy towards the Taliban the Americans response to the events in the region was not pragmatic. When it came to Afghanistan, Clinton’s eight years in office were mired by long periods of inaction, whimsical plans, such as the CIA hiring hit squads from Pakistan and Uzbekistan to capture bin Laden; and a sudden decision to use cruise missiles to target Al’-Qaeda camps after the bombing of the US embassies in Africa. But the Americans lacked determination to get rid of Al’-Qaeda or the Taliban, and there was less of a policy toward Pakistan, especially one that addressed the military’s support to the Taliban.

In the second term of Clinton, instead of an oriented approach, US government departments seemed to have different agendas for the region. For the State Department the main issue was easing India-Pakistan tensions, deterring nuclear proliferation, and persuading both countries to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty after they had both tested nuclear weapons. The CIA focused was on bin-Laden and the threat of the Pakistani military supporting causes that were deemed to be terrorist by the outside world. Yet the CIA refused to support the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance and mistrusted its leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud. The Pentagon declined to get involved either way and did not even bother to draw up contingency plans for any possible military action in Afghanistan.

During his tenure in office Clinton gave excessive stress on foreign policy issues, determining that intervention was a good idea while the public mood indicated
the contrary. The Republicans had won the 2000 US elections on the basis of not more but less involvement in the world and a short-sighted “go it alone” philosophy that ignored existing alliances and treaties. Condoleezza Rice stated in a January 2000 article for *Foreign Affairs* that a Bush presidency would focus on the national interest instead of international humanitarian actions, as Clinton had done (Rice 2000, 45-62). Muslim leaders in the region understood this as a lack of US interest. Bush said he would avoid “open-ended deployments and unclear military mission,” adding, “I don’t think our troops ought to be used for what’s called nation-building – I think our troops ought to be used to fight and win wars” (Ferguson 2004). These words were to haunt Bush after 9/11, keeping him on his heels during the entire eight years in the White House.

### 3.6 Impact of war on Afghanistan

The impact of war in Afghanistan has been comprehensively destructive. The destruction caused by more than two decades of instability has affected every phase of Afghan life. It not only caused physical destruction but also created economic and political disarray and had brought about socio-cultural changes. The Afghan war has completely destroyed the progress towards nation building. The nation's infrastructure was ruined with more than half of Afghanistan's twenty four thousand villages being destroyed, large sections of the major cities reduced to rubble, roads turned into dirt tracks and farms made unsafe being sown with mines instead of seeds (Rubin 1989-1990). Due to continuous war more than 50 percent of Afghanistan's population has been directly harmed through death, injury, or displacement. By comparison with many other countries, there was little to destroy in Afghanistan to begin with, and whatever worthwhile was there had been targeted during the war lasting more than two decades. At one point or another since 1978, virtually everything in Afghanistan has been a target.

Much of the economic infrastructure has been destroyed by war, including urban factories, power supply and transportation links, and important agricultural area. Prior to the Americans beginning the “Operation Enduring Freedom” the major changes which Afghanistan was experiencing economically, politically and socially were that the war has destroyed pre-war elites and the social system that supported them, led to the development of new political elites (mujahideen and Taliban) which gave a new role to youths and Islamist ideologues. Secondly, the war transformed the
role of violence in society, even in non-combatant situations. It not only made the Afghan citizens more used to the everyday violence, but in the absence of any proper government or social institution even the common masses resorted to violence for settling their disputes. The continuation of the Afghan conflict long after the Soviet withdrawal delayed the rebuilding of the state institutions and maintained new elites in power, leaving Afghan society with rudimentary political system that barely functioned. Finally, the war shattered the traditional Afghan economy and an opium heroin economic sector based on drug trafficking emerged to replace it (Weinbaum 1991; Haq 1996).

The continuous instability has a profound impact on the culture of Afghanistan. Virtually every area of popular culture has been affected over the past two decades: the arts and music, architecture, customs, education, historical heritage, the intelligentsia, literature, publishing, and sports, to name a few. Afghanistan's intellectual class and educational system has suffered tremendously during the war. Intellectuals were first targeted by the Soviets and Afghan communists and later by the Taliban. The collapse of its educational system and the destruction of its intellectual class have left Afghanistan with overwhelming illiterate population, especially of the females with only few remaining teachers. The absence of intellectuals assisted the Islamisation of the vast majority of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, as the refugee camps provided a fertile ground for the spread of Islamist education, enabling a movement like Taliban to evolve (Goodson 2001: 129).

Likewise Afghanistan's literature and publishing have declined and was almost negligible during the Taliban era. The few newspapers that existed were affiliated with one or another political faction and were published sporadically. Kabul radio produced mostly government pronouncements and religious programming. Even Afghanistan's cultural heritage failed to survive the long war. In January 1993 the Kabul museum was damaged in fighting and its priceless collection looted. Many of Afghanistan's important architectural sites, especially in and around Kabul have been reduced to rubble in fighting, including the mausoleum of Nadir Shah, Babur's garden, Darulaman Palace and the Victory arch in Paghman. On February 26, 2001, two ancient figures of Lord Buddha carved on a cliff in Bamiyan and all other pre-Islamic figures, including those little left in Kabul's National Museum after the loss of 1993 were destroyed, on the grounds that they were idolatrous (Manhart 2004: 118).
In 2001, Afghanistan under Taliban gave a good example of a weak state that has suffered from state failure in the post-Cold War era. Yet, no one had the faintest idea as for how long people of Afghanistan will have to bear the tyrannical rule of Taliban, and who would come to their rescue. Finally, after the incident of September 11, 2001, it was America, which came to the rescue of Afghanistan. The US-Taliban relations that were already at their lowest point were finally ripped after the tragic incident of 9/11 which was the result of the close assistance between Taliban and Osama bin-Laden's Al-Qaida. As Taliban provided safe sanctuary to Osama bin-Laden and Mullah Omar was not ready to hand him over to America which forced America to take massive retaliatory steps. Thus, the US military campaign began with massive air strikes on October 7, 2001, which marked the beginning of 'Operation Enduring Freedom' and forced Taliban to flee from Kabul on November 13, 2001.

The worldwide reaction was sharply polarised. France, Germany and Italy endorsed the military operations and offered to contribute their own forces if that would help reduce the burden of international law enforcement that the US and the UK had manually shouldered. The Russian government also provided its unequivocal backing. Within the Islamic world, Iraq and Iran expressed their disapproval, characterising the air strikes on Afghanistan as "unacceptable" (Muralidharan 2001: 6).

As bombs continued to fall on Afghanistan, the political strategy to install a new regime in Kabul made discernible progress. On November 13, 2001, the Taliban deserted Kabul and the Northern Alliance walked into the city unopposed prompting UN Security Council Resolution 1378 the following day. The resolution affirmed the UN's central role in supporting political transition efforts and called for a new government that would be "broad based, multi-ethnic and fully representative of all the Afghan people" (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1378 (2001), UN doc. S/2001/ 1378). The intense diplomacy of the United Nations and the United States got key parties to agree to a conference to name an interim administration and chart the future political transition. The UN brokered conference began on November 27, 2001, when the key representatives of the various Afghan interest groups met in Petersburg, near Bonn, along with senior diplomats from the United Nations and diplomats from 17 countries. On December 5, they finally signed the 'Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions', more commonly known as 'The Bonn Agreement'. The
Taliban stronghold of Kandhar finally fell on December 9, 2001, just within a month after their retreat from Kabul.

3.7 Summary

Due to the political turmoil in the early 1990s – the Soviet Union’s disintegration and the America’s engagement in Iraq, Afghanistan receded in the background. By the mid-1990s, Afghanistan was in tatters. Instability and war provided fertile ground for terrorist groups to train and hide in Afghanistan. Due to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s inability to capture Kabul, Pakistan assisted a new force – the Taliban. This group of young religious zealots from southern Afghanistan seized the moment. But, the Taliban struck a dangerous bargain by sheltering Osama bin Laden and his international jihadist network. It was a fateful mistake. Osama used his money and influence to support the Taliban regime. If Mullah Omar had shied away from a relationship with Osama bin Laden, the United States might have left the Taliban alone. Instead, Afghanistan became a nexus for the Taliban’s radical Deobandism and Al’-Qaida’s global jihad. After the tragic incident of 9/11, US took massive retaliatory measures, and began its ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ ultimately forcing Taliban to flee Kabul in November. This was followed by the beginning of massive rebuilding process in Afghanistan.