

Mohammad Humayun Kabir
Abu Taher Salahuddin Ahmed

POST-COMMUNIST AFGHANISTAN : IMPLICATIONS, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR A NEW ORDER

The installation on 28 April 1992 of Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, a Peshawar-based Afghan Mujahideen leader, as the interim President of Afghanistan has marked the end of fourteen years of communist experiment in his country, thereby heralding the beginning of a new chapter in its history. Dr. Syed Mohammad Najibullah, in power since 1986 and the last of the four Afghan communist rulers who had been propped up by the former Soviet Union since its military intervention in its southern neighbour in December 1979 and assisted even after Moscow's withdrawal in February 1989, was forced by his own men to resign on 18 April 1992. His attempt to flee the country had failed and he then, out of desperation, sought refuge in the Kabul United Nations (UN) Headquarters where he still remains a haunted man.

Although General Nabi Azimi took power from Najibullah, the latter's eclipse spelt a collapse of authority in Kabul creating there a sort of power vacuum, which, in turn, set in motion a chain of events

Mohammad Humayun Kabir, Senior Research Fellow, BISS, presently D. Phil. Scholar at the Oxford University. **Abu Taher Salahuddin Ahmed**, Research Associate, West Asia and Africa Desk, BISS.

eventually leading to the formation of an interim Islamic government in Kabul that represents not only most of the Mujahideen parties and field commanders, but also some of the former communist leaders and militia commanders. The government has since declared Afghanistan an Islamic Republic, and has enacted some *Sharia* laws. But the end of the communist rule and the installation of a new regime have not yet established a peaceful stable order in the country. The turmoil, which has assumed a different dimension, continues unabated. A severe infighting has broken out within the Mujahideen ranks. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the wily leader of the *Hizbe Islami* faction of the Peshwar-based Afghan resistance alliance who chose not to join the interim Afghan government, has been launching continual attacks on Kabul. Afghanistan continues to be at war with itself, despite the removal of the devil of communism. Burhanuddin Rabbani, who took over the Afghan Presidency after Mojaddedi's two-month term had expired at the end of June, has a tenure of four months during which he is mandated to hold the *Loya Jirga* (Afghan Grand Assembly) that would prepare the ground for holding the elections within two years.

These developments in Afghanistan are significant in many ways not only for the new Republic itself, but also for the countries in the region and beyond. The post-Najibullah Afghanistan, therefore, merits an in-depth study to highlight the implications of the abrupt and radical change of regime in Kabul, focus on the massive challenges that are facing it, and to indicate the prospects for a stable and democratic order in Afghanistan.

The broad questions that are dealt with in this paper relate to the causes that led to the demise of Najibullah and his regime and the consequent emergence of a hitherto incredible coalition of forces that are now donning the gauntlet of power in Kabul. The paper also relates the prevailing international situation as a contributing factor to the developments in Afghanistan. The study attempts to highlight the

probable impact and implications of these developments on the neighbouring countries and beyond. The paper also identifies the formidable array of problems and challenges that the new Afghan regime is confronted with in its task of rehabilitating the returning refugees and rebuilding a country that has been ravaged by fourteen years of communism, foreign intervention, and civil war.

Contrary to popular perceptions, it is argued here that the Mujahideen capture of power in Kabul is not a victory for them. In fact, they have not won the war, let alone the peace. We also contend that most of the challenges facing the Afghan regime are inherent in the way it has found itself in power in Afghanistan. It is also argued that a political and a socio-cultural equilibrium has to be restored in Afghanistan in order to set the country on the path of order, peace, and progress.

FROM 'REPUBLIC' TO 'ISLAMIC REPUBLIC' OF AFGHANISTAN

General Mohammad Daud, the then Prime Minister of Afghanistan and a cousin of King Zahir Shah, overthrew the monarchy in 1973 and declared his country a Republic. Afghanistan was baptised three times by the Afghan communists since their takeover in 1978, in an attempt to 'humanise' the communist regime. The names given to it were 'People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan', 'Democratic Republic of Afghanistan' and 'Republic of Afghanistan'. The last communist christening was done by Najibullah, who became Secretary General of the party on 4 May 1986 and subsequently Afghan President on 30 November 1987.

The Soviets, who had completed their troops withdrawal in February 1989, continued to prop up Najibullah with military and

economic assistance,¹ while at the same time it urged him to broaden the base of his regime and to seek a peaceful outcome to the conflict. Despite the continuous Soviet help Afghan watchers could hardly believe that Kabul regime would survive for long the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. But Najibullah's continued staying in power amazed his friends and foes alike. His policy of national reconciliation, embodying significant changes in Afghan institutions and in the constitution,² proved to be more effective stratagem in his efforts to hang on to power, than the classic communist model which was itself being discredited in Moscow.

On the other hand, the Afghan resistance forces, called the Mujahideen who launched their operation from Pakistan as well as from within the Afghan territory, were unable to dislodge Najibullah regime in Kabul. They were rent with internecine strife. They could neither forge a unified military command nor a sound political strategy in order to convincingly claim to be a viable alternative to the Kabul regime. Despite the formation with Pakistan's help of the Afghan Interim Government (AIG) in Peshwar in 1989 and the holding of the Mujahideen Commanders' meeting in October 1990,³ the Mujahideen remained ineffective until the middle of 1991. What then had changed the Afghan situation that precipitated the collapse of Najibullah regime, eventually installing the Mujahideen in power in Kabul? An attempt is made below to provide answer to this question.

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1. Even after the Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan, Moscow continued to pour in military and economic assistance, estimated at over US \$ 300 million a month. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report/Near East-South Asia, 15 May 1990, p. 21, taken from Theodor L. Eliot, Jr., "Afghanistan in 1990: Grouping Toward Peace?" *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXI, No. 2, February 1991, p. 128.
 2. See, Olivier Roy, "The Lessons of the Soviet/Afghan War" *Adelphi Papers* 259, IISS, London, Summer 1991, p. 28.
 3. See Theodore L. Eliot, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 129.

External Developments Impinging on Afghanistan

Afghanistan was a nagging cold war issue where a dirty zero-sum game was played out between the United States and the former Soviet Union for more than a decade. With the end of the Cold War the geo-strategic salience of Afghanistan to both patrons was reduced to a minimum, affording them the occasion to embark on a disengagement policy in regard to Kabul. Pursuant to this policy, the superpowers struck a deal in September 1991 on a 'negative symmetry' to be effective from 1 January 1992. Accordingly, they cut off the supply of money and arms to their surrogates. The collapse of the Soviet Union itself by the end of 1991 had irretrievably paralysed the Kabul regime as it ceased to receive economic as well as politico-ideological and military props from Moscow.

This severely weakened the Najibullah regime, as it undercut its morale and tipped the balance in favour of the Mujahideen who continued to receive help from Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Such a turn of events encouraged some of the Mujahideen groups to forge a realignment of forces in Afghanistan in their final push to force out Najibullah and capture power in Kabul.

But with the end of the Cold War and the consequent crumbling of the post-World War II international system, the United States and Russia had different priorities in Afghanistan. Both now preferred a peaceful transition of power in Kabul with a view to ensuring a moderate and democratic dispensation in Afghanistan. The alternative, they appear to have realised, might be fraught with uncertainties as far as stability in this volatile country and the nature of its possible regime were concerned. They were, therefore, instrumental in reactivating the UN peace process concerning Afghanistan by having sent Benon Sevan, the UN Secretary General's special envoy. Early in 1992, he embarked on a vigorous shuttle diplomacy between Islamabad, Tehran, and Kabul. His peace plan envisaged creation of a neutral, all-

Afghan interim government that would precede the UN-convened *Loya Jirga*, scheduled to meet at the end of April 1992 either at Vienna or Geneva. The *Loya Jirga* of 150-200 prominent Afghans would offer every faction a chance of representation. The objective of Sevan's plan was "to ensure an orderly transfer of power to provide necessary security and safety to the people and to work out necessary international guarantees, including possible involvement of the UN Security Council."⁴

The public postures of the government of Pakistan and Iran seemed favourable to the UN peace initiative. Najibullah also brought himself to bear with the consequences of Sevan's peace formula for his country. Because it would guarantee his honourable exit from the Afghan scene, ensuring, at the same time, a role for his *Watan* Party in the future Afghan government. But the Mujahideen groups had a different reading on the Sevan formula. Some of the Mujahideen groups, such as, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's *Hezbe Islami*, argued that it was not just Najibullah that they wanted out, but they would not sit on the same table in any forum with any member of the Kabul regime.⁵ The consequence of the use of a UN peacekeeping force was also not lost on the Mujahideen. Hekmatyar, declaring that the UN was a tool of the United States, bluntly told reporters that the Mujahideen would never accept such a force on Afghan soil.⁶

Although Hekmatyar champions radical Islamic views, it was he to whom most of the American arms and money were funnelled through the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan. He also enjoyed the support of the Pakistan government. He greatly contributed to the Mujahideen war efforts against the Soviets and the Kabul government

4. See, *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hong Kong), (hereafter *FEER*), 16 April 1992, p. 13; and 23 April 1992, p. 12.

5. *FEER* (Hong Kong), 16 April 1992, p. 13.

6. *Ibid.*

forces. He has always considered himself a man of destiny in the post-Najibullah Afghanistan. As he saw the Sevan peace plan for his country standing between him and power in Kabul he turned it down. But this ambitious man failed to comprehend the intricacies of shifting alliance in the context of the post-Cold War and post-Soviet international environ.

Ahmed Shah Masud, who belongs to the Tajik minority ethnic group and is known widely as the 'Tiger of Panshir Valley', was the most outstanding Mujahideen Commander and an arch rival to Hekmatyar. He belongs to the relatively moderate *Jamiat-i-Islami* Party which is led by Burhanuddin Rabbani. Masud had his own agenda to make it to Kabul. He seemed to have fathomed that under the Sevan peace formula the ambitions of a leader of an ethnic minority might not come about. So he outsmarted the Cyprus-born UN envoy by seizing power in Kabul before the latter (Sevan) could embark upon implementing his peace plan. But Masud was not the only one who wanted such a change of guards in Kabul. There were other actors and forces in Afghanistan who joined hands with Masud with the purpose of sharing out the pie of new power in Kabul.

Internal Developments

All these were the culmination of the inherent tension within the Afghan ruling party, the government, and the armed forces. In fact, this is a mirror-image of the Afghan society itself, which is multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-cultural often with varied interests. The Afghans, therefore, are often seen to have conflicting loyalties, making the task of building a well-integrated body politic rather stupendous. The Afghan communist party, called the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), and later *Watan* Party also had two main factions in it, namely, the *Khalq* and the *Parcham*. Although within the same party, they had doctrinal differences with each other over the issues concerning their attitude towards the text-

book tenets of Marxism-Leninism as well as the instruments of their implementation in a widely divergent Muslim society like Afghanistan. Some elements in both factions are more radical than the others, depending on the issues involved. Some are ethnically more biased than others, often generating resentment among the minority Tajiks and Uzbeks against the majority Pashtuns who have ruled the country since 1747. There are even clannish rivalry among the Pashtuns themselves. For example, the Ghilzays resent the Durranis who had, in fact, established the monarchy in Afghanistan. The same problems rent the vital institutions like the government itself and the armed forces spurring a number of successful and attempted coups as well as defections to the rival camps during the communist rule in Afghanistan.⁷

Although Najibullah succeeded in surviving the defections and in crushing several coup attempts, the policies he adopted in accomplishing such a feat ultimately proved to be fatal for him and his regime. His policies fuelled unrest in the army and antagonised the ethnic minorities. For instance, to counter the influence of the Khalqi dominated Afghan army, Najibullah built up other armed units, which were better paid and had better weapons and facilities than the regulars. This made the latter very envious of the former, causing dissensions in the army ranks. Najibullah's move to replace key officials in Kabul and military commanders in the north of the country with members of the long-dominant Pashtun ethnic group⁸ triggered defection and mutiny in the armed forces. Najibullah also failed, thanks to the impact of the 'negative symmetry', to crush an army mutiny in Hairatan.⁹ It was a red signal for the generals, who began to

7. *Asia Yearbook 1991* (Hong Kong, 1991), p. 62.

8. *The Economist* (London), 11 April 1992, p. 30.

9. *Ibid.*, 25 April 1992, p. 21.

doubt Najibullah's durability, and prepared to switch sides. The generals correctly analysed the internal and external situations and came to the conclusion that the days of the Afghan communists were over and it was time for them to change tags.

General Abdul Rashid Dostam who commands the ferocious Uzbek militia, Generals Mansour Naderi who is the Ismaeli leader from Baghlan province, and General Abdul Momin, commander of the 70th Brigade in the north who was the first army General to rebel against Najibullah's regime, linked up with forces of a willing Mujahideen commander Ahmad Shah Masud¹⁰ who then included these Generals in his Islamic *Jihad* Council. This dramatic event took place in Afghanistan's second city, Mazar-i-Sharif, and many other cities and military bases such as, Charikar, Bagram, Herat, Kunduz, Kandahar, Sanangan, and Jalalabad fell like dominoes as a result of local level deals with Mujahideen commanders. As head of the *Jihad* Council, Masud had already held meeting with Abdul Wakil, Najibullah's Foreign Minister.

These events plunged Najibullah into a credibility crisis. He was forced to step down on 18 April 1992 and he then unsuccessfully attempted to flee the country. General Mohammad Nabi Azimi, incidentally a Tajik and commander of the Kabul garrison, became the new strongman; but he was too happy to deal with Masud, a fellow Tajik, in order to protect himself and as many others as possible.

There was, thus, a virtual power vacuum in Kabul, which essentially shook the Pakistan- and Iran-based Mujahideen into action. Nawaz Sharif, the Pakistan Prime Minister, had long sessions with the Mujahideen leaders in Peshawar. An interim government for Afghanistan was cobbled together on 24 April 1992, but Hekmatyar and a couple of others would not join it. Mojaddedi was chosen as

10. *Washington Post*, 15 March, 1992.

President of the interim government for two months. Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Tajik and Masud's political boss, was to succeed him for four months during which elections were in Kabul on 28 April 1992. The Mujahideen, thus, found themselves in power after fourteen years of their not-so-effective fight against the communist regime in Kabul. The new regime, which declared Afghanistan an Islamic Republic, is actually being propped up by the military might of Masud and Dostam. Despite the inclusion of Pashtun Kabul leaders like Mojaddedi in the present Kabul government, the regime is essentially a minority-dominated one. It is very significant that for the first time in Afghan history, the very dominance of Pashtuns has been badly shaken by the country's smaller ethnic groups.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHANGE OF REGIME IN KABUL

The Afghan conflict was one of those intractable Cold War imbroglios which captured the world attention during the 1980s. It was so not only because the United States administration was overtly hyperactive in its efforts to roll back Soviet communism from Afghanistan, a country whose relationship has traditionally been close with its giant northern neighbour, but also because of Washington's choosing of Afghan allies to achieve its policy objectives in that landlocked mountainous country. Of course, one could understand the U.S. compulsions for backing the Mujahideen in their fight against the godless Soviets and their Afghan proteges. But it was interesting to see the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran on the same side of the political divide in Afghanistan. Needless to say that each had its own interests and objectives in Afghanistan. The implications of the fall of the communist regime and the installation of an Islamic government in Kabul will, therefore, not be same on all these powers and the other parties interested in the developments in Afghanistan.

The impact of the new government in Afghanistan will be felt domestically, regionally, and perhaps, even globally. And, of course, the fallout would depend on Afghan domestic and foreign policies. The new government in Kabul has declared Afghanistan an Islamic Republic, and has decided to be guided by the austere dictates of Islamic law. All laws conflicting with the *Sharia* are to be rescinded and all workers ordered to observe fixed prayer times. Books that were deemed "anti-religious and anti-*jihad*" were burnt. Western films were banned. Women were instructed to adopt suitably "modest" dress.¹¹ As far as Afghanistan's external relations are concerned, Mojaddedi had reassured the world that his government would adhere to an independent and nonaligned foreign policy. President Rabbani would not officially change the line. However, Ahmad Shah Masud, the all-influential Defence Minister of Afghanistan, has bared the essentials of the new regime's intended pattern of foreign relations when he stated that his country's attitude towards external powers would depend on their attitude and role in the Afghan conflict in the past years.¹² Despite such measures and statements, the true nature of the Afghan Islamic regime is yet to crystallize and the discernible contours of its foreign policy are yet to be fashioned out. Nevertheless, the developments in Afghanistan are likely to have certain politico-strategic impact on the countries of the region and beyond.

Regional Implications

The developments in Afghanistan are significant for the neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, India, the newly-emerged Central Asian Republics (CAR), and China.

11. *Time* (New York), 15 June 1992, p. 25, *Newsweek* (New York), 18 May 1992, p.31.

12. It is clear from Masud's statement "I cannot say for sure whether we will honour the commitments made by the previous communist regime." See Rahul Singh, "Afghansitan: India is Loser," *Dialogue* (Dhaka), 15 May 1992, p. 4.

Pakistan: Pakistan is likely to be affected most of all, positively or negatively, as has been the case for the last fourteen years. Following the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan has been the home for more than 3 million Afghan refugees, and the seven-party Sunni Afghan Mujahideen alliance based in the city of Peshawar. Pakistan was the conduit through which American arms and money were supplied to the Afghan Mujahideen, who launched from Pakistani territory their operations against the Soviet troops and Afghan government forces putting Pakistan at the risk of reprisals. In the Afghan war, Pakistan suffered most among the externally involved parties. The hope of gaining most helped Pakistan endure the odds that normally accompany a war involving a superpower. Pakistan made good use of its status of a 'frontline state' by making the United States into supplying to it such sophisticated arms that were apparently intended to be used against India should such occasion arise. It is often contended that Pakistan considered the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan a good opportunity first to resolve the 'Pushtunistan' issue definitively and then try to establish a Muslim belt south of the Soviet Union under Pakistani influence. It is also argued that Pakistan's Generals even nurtured a more ambitious objective: to establish, through a federation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, a Sunni Muslim belt that would have given Pakistan the strategic depth it lacks *vis-a-vis* India.¹³ For this purpose, Pakistan needed to control the future Islamic government in Afghanistan. The key to such Pakistan's policy was Hekmatyar. One scholar aptly put the reason why Pakistan picked him up from among the lot of Mujahideen leaders: "Hekmatyar was regarded as the most anti-Indian Afghan politician. As a refugee in Pakistan since 1975, supported financially by the Pakistani Army under Ali Bhutto's Orders in 1975, he was regarded as a tool of the ISI. As a Pashtun Ghilzay, he was seen as instrumental to Pakistani Pashtun policy, which consisted in playing

13. Olivier Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 40

the Ghilzays off against the less reliable Durranis and the more remote Tajiks, who were thought to be too susceptible to Iranian influence, being Persian speakers. Lacking popular support inside Afghanistan, Hekmatyar relied more on Pakistani (and Saudi) help, and was thus seen as easier to control by the Pakistani authorities.¹⁴ What Pakistan actually wanted was to instal in Kabul a Mujahideen government of its own making or liking, preferably Hekmatyar as its head. Pakistan, therefore, made every effort to ensure the dominance of Hekmatyar over others. But that was not to be, as is evident from the prevailing post-Najibullah scenario in Afghanistan. Pakistan, adapting rather swiftly to the fast-changing situation in Afghanistan, has virtually abandoned Hekmatyar and sided closer towards the present regime in Kabul. In fact the Pakistani Prime Minister (PM) Nawaz Sharif had put together the interim Mujahideen government and reached it to Kabul. The Pak PM himself made an airdash to the Afghan capital on 29 April 1992, only the second day of the Mujahideen government in office, as a symbolic gesture of his country's total support for the Islamic regime. He also declared his country's preparedness to provide all possible assistance to Afghanistan for rehabilitation and reconstruction. All these were to ensure the new Afghan government's loyalty and the friendship, which Pakistan so dearly values for reasons indicated above.

The collapse of the Moscow-backed communist regime in Afghanistan has essentially transformed Pakistan's security environment. It used to face two hostile neighbours—India and Afghanistan—that had converging interests in neutralising the Pakistan factor in the Afghan conflict. Acting together, they could exacerbate ethnic conflict within Pakistan. The installation of a Mujahideen government in Kabul has apparently eased Pakistan's two-front security dilemma. A Pakistani scholar has rightly said that the possibility of Russian or

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

Indian exercise of any influence in this strategic backyard of Pakistan was essentially eliminated.¹⁵

However, some negative impact of the development in Afghanistan on Pakistan cannot be altogether ruled out. Pakistan's salience in the strategic calculus of the United States had fallen in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. The end of the Cold War has further eroded Pakistan's strategic position *vis-a-vis* the United States, marking the beginning of a cool phase in the relationship between the two countries. In the wake of the Gulf War in early 1991, Washington cancelled the supply of military and economic aid committed to Islamabad, as President Bush would not certify to Congress that Pakistan was not engaged in nuclear weapons programme. Due to change of regime in Afghanistan, Pakistan has finally lost its 'frontline state' status. Islamabad's apparent loss of its long-time patron, the United States, may also mean a new phase of improvement in the Indo-US relations. The ethnic divide between Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns is the main fissure in the polity of post-Najibullah Afghanistan. Apprehensions are making rounds in the region that the turmoil that continues to plague Afghanistan, may push the Afghan Pashtuns into carving up Afghanistan eventually raising the spectre of 'Greater Pashtunistan'.¹⁶ It would be a nightmare scenario for Pakistan which is bedevilled by its own nationality problems. Pakistan government's jettisoning of Hekmatyar has outraged the *Jamiat-i-Islami* of Pakistan, a partner in the ruling coalition which is keeping on supporting the *Hezbe Islami* party of the rebel Afghan leader Hekmatyar. The composition of the Afghan interim government, in which Hekmatyar is conspicuous by his

15. Rasul B. Rais, "Afghanistan and Regional Security after Cold War," *Problems of Communism*, Vo., XLI, May-June, 1992, p. 88.

16. See for details, Aabha Dixit, "Political Uncertainty in Kabul Would Work Against Islamabad," *Strategic Analysis*. Vol. XV, No. 4, July 1992, pp. 285-89.

non-inclusion, has effected a partial 'decomposition' of the Pakistan government as the *Jamiat-i-Islami* has eventually withdrawn from the ruling coalition in Islamabad. The highly unstable situation in Afghanistan is also likely to discourage the Afghan refugees to return home from their camps in Pakistan. The host country would thus continue to be affected in terms of economic cost, ecological degradation, and even social tranquility and political stability. Therefore, a Mujahideen government, that does not enjoy the support of all important Afghan resistance factions and 'functions' in a critically unstable situation, may pose serious problems to Pakistan's security and politics. Pakistan is also likely to be wary of the possible fallout of the various Islamic measures adopted by the Afghan interim government on Pakistan's politics and society. Any such impact would, of course, depend on the brand of Islam the Kabul government ultimately chooses to adhere to.

Iran: Iran is another country which had directly felt the heat of the fire of the *Saur* revolution in Afghanistan until it was extinguished by the dying monster of Cold War. Basically, Iran has three interests in Afghanistan: strategic, ethnic, and religious. Iran wants to retain the Islamic identity of Afghanistan and aspires to influence it through pro-Iranian Afghan elements. It, therefore, loathes the role of other powers which tend to exercise influence in Afghan affairs at the expense of that of Tehran. Iran, which is Shiite and mainly Persian speaking, intends to promote the interests of ethnic (Tajiks and Uzbeks) and religious (Shia) minorities in Afghanistan. The attitude and role of the Afghan majority, who are Pashtuns by ethnic origin and Sunni Muslim by Islamic sect, and any other external powers that impinge on the interests of Afghan minorities as well as those of Iran itself are of great significance.

Iran, which has provided shelter to more than 2 million Afghan refugees and sanctuary to eight Shiite Mujahideen groups, was one of

those countries which vehemently denounced the Soviet intervention and did its best to compel Moscow to withdraw from Afghanistan. After the Soviet withdrawal, Iran channelised its efforts towards thwarting from Afghanistan the influence of Saudi Arabia, a country that champions the *Wahhabi* (strictly fundamentalist) version of Sunni creed of Islam. Iran's regional ambitions are not new. In fact, the West, particularly the United States, encouraged these during the reign of Shah of Iran. The post-revolution developments inside Iran and its war with Iraq had kept Tehran's desire for becoming a regional influential in abeyance. The emergence of six Muslim states in Central Asia and the Caucasus out of the debris of the Soviet Union, Iraq's defeat in the Gulf War II, and Pakistan's fall from the U.S. grace appear to have whetted Iran's aspiration for influence in Central and South West Asia. The road of Tehran's influence to Central Asia runs through Kabul.

Iran, which had mostly confined its support to the Shia factions, sought greater representation of the Shia parties within the multitude of resistance groups and in the Mujahideen successor regime in Afghanistan. Iran never felt comfortable with the Peshawar-based Sunni Mujahideen parties, especially the *Hezb-e-Islami* of Hekmatyar which has fed on the U.S. and Saudi support. In the beginning of 1992, amidst momentous changes in the international environment, Iran egged on the minorities, even though some of them like Uzbeks under General Dostam are not Shias and are of Turkic origin, in the hope of advancing Iranian influence in Afghanistan. Iran, therefore, has been a backstage player greatly contributing to the enactment of the first scene of the post-Najibullah Afghan drama. The present configuration of forces in Afghanistan gives Iran immense political clout, much more than it has had since the days when Afghanistan was a small province of the old Persian Empire. Any significant change in the combination of forces in Afghanistan may be fraught with uncertainties for Iran. The ongoing turmoil, which may

snowball into *Lebanonizaion of Afghanistan*, may, in fact, inflict deleterious impact not only on Iran but also to other neighbouring countries.

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia has apparently lost out in Afghanistan. Although Afghanistan does not pose any security threat to Saudi Arabia, the interest of the latter in the former is not new. Saudi political and religious influences have been linked in Afghanistan since the 1950s, when *Wahhabi* elements began to establish religious schools in Pakistan in which a number of Afghan *Mullahs* were trained.¹⁷ In more recent times, the Saudi objective in Afghanistan was first to drive out the Soviet communist bear and then to counter Iranian influence. The Saudis funnelled into Afghanistan a lot of human and financial resources with a hope to promote *Wahhabism* at the cost of *Sufism*, a popular version of Islam preached by *Pirs* (Islamic Saints) and predominantly practised in Afghanistan. Despite lavish financial incentive handed out to such Afghan Mujahideen leaders as Sayyaf, Hekmatyar, Khales, and even Rabbani, the current interim Afghan President, the Saudi interests in the post-communist Afghanistan are yet to materialise. The present constellation of personalities in Kabul and the spiritual views they hold and represent do not seem to favourably contribute to the promotion of Riyadh's interests. However, Saudi petro-dollars, seemed essential in the uphill task of rehabilitation and rebuilding of Afghanistan, may decidedly administer an impelling influence on Kabul to adopt a softer approach towards Saudi Arabia.

India: Afghanistan by itself normally does not directly endanger Indian security. However, depending on the nature of regime in Kabul, the domestic situation in Afghanistan and the foreign involvement in it, India may perceive developments in Afghanistan as impinging on its national interests and security. India's policy towards

17. See for details, Olivier Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

Afghanistan is determined by strategic and religious considerations. Pakistan is the *bete-noire* in all this. A pro-Indian Afghan government or a government in Kabul at least friendly to India but hostile or unfriendly to Pakistan is practically a strategic ally of New Delhi. Given the history of relationship between New Delhi and Islamabad, a sandwiched Pakistan is a status that India greatly relishes. The involvement of an external power in Afghanistan, which negatively affects Pakistan but does not spillover into India, is a source of great pleasure to South Block. Similarly, if the involvement of an external power in Afghan affairs enhances by implication Pakistan's defence preparedness, it is a situation that India would invariably denounce as hostile security environment. Conversely, if the regime in Kabul is friendly to Islamabad, not to speak of a pro-Pakistani Afghan government, India would be uncomfortable. India would be far more uncomfortable if the Afghan government is directly unfriendly or hostile to New Delhi. And such developments in India's north-western flank would not be considered propitious to New Delhi's self-imposed leadership role in the region. Given these calculations, New Delhi adopted a policy that was supportive of the Soviet version of events in Afghanistan. Unlike its neighbours and the overwhelming majority of Third World countries, India never questioned the political legitimacy of various Afghan Marxist leaders installed by Moscow, from Noor Muhammad Taraki in 1978 right down to Najibullah. Rather, it continued business as usual, extending technical and economic assistance to the beleaguered Afghan regimes.¹⁸ Without withdrawing its support for Najibullah, India fostered contacts with the Mujahideen and other individuals less dependent of Pakistan.

18. Yossef Bodansky, "New Pressures on Key Indian Borderlands," *Janes' Defence Weekly* (London), 30 April 1988, p. 840; Theodore L. Eliot, Jr., and Robert L. Pfalzgraff, Jr., (eds.) *The Red Army on Pakistan's Border: Policy Implication for the United States*, (Washington D. C. Pergamon-Brassey's, 1986), pp. 44-70.

Natwar Singh, the Indian Minister for External Affairs, even paid a visit to the former King Zahir Shah in Rome in January 1988.

India's unflagging support for the Marxist regime in Kabul may preclude New Delhi's chances of drawing benefit from the post-Najib scenario in Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, India seems to have earned the ire of all the various Mujahideen factions. The interim Mujahideen government has indicated that Kabul will have to review its relations with New Delhi in the light of latter's persistent opposition to the struggle of the Mujahideen against the Soviet Union and the Kabul regime.¹⁹ India seems to have lost out in Afghanistan. An Indian commentator has succinctly put it : "India is being completely marginalised in Afghanistan, a nation with which it has had long and intimate contacts and which it has considered as a counter-weight to Pakistan."²⁰ India is also worried about the impact that an Islamic regime would have on it, particularly on Kashmir. It is reported that some Afghan Mujahideen fighters are fighting alongside their Muslim brethren in Kashmir²¹ against New Delhi's rule. However, in regard to Indo-Afghan relations, one must be cautioned against drawing a conclusion that they are beyond redemption. In fact, much would depend on how the Pak-Afghan equation evolves and how New Delhi goes about mending its fences with Kabul. As a matter of fact, Afghanistan could benefit from economic and technical cooperation with India as has been the case before. New Delhi could also contribute towards rebuilding the war-torn country. Afghanistan may also see the wisdom of maintaining its 'India card' *vis-a-vis* Pakistan, as a stick to beat off the latter's unwarranted influence in the former.

19. See, Rahul Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

21. India is worried by Rabbani's support for Muslim militants in Kashmir, See, *Asiaweek* (Hong Kong), 11 September 1992, p. 35; see also, Rahul Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Central Asian Republics : The developments in Afghanistan are also casting their shadow on to the newly emerged CARs of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan which share not only borders but also ethnic, cultural, and religious affinities with Afghanistan. Due to lack of consensus on economic and political forms and on state identity in these former Soviet Republics, they may be influenced by ideas. The once closed borders between Afghanistan and these countries are becoming more porous and across them not only ideas can travel but also arms do flow in.

Elites in Central Asia perceive Islamist movements in its neighbourhood as highly destabilising. Most of them being former communists, feel their legitimacy threatened by crossborder Islamic influences emanating from Afghanistan. Before the fall of the Najibullah regime, the Central Asian leaders in their attempt to mute the Islamic zeal of future Kabul regime, wanted to see all the concerned Afghan parties participate in its formation.²² They were, in fact, being haunted by the memories of their bad experience during the Soviet days when some of the more enthusiastic Afghan rebel commanders did indeed conduct a number of small hit-and-run operations in Samarkand and Bokhara with the hope of extending their *Jihad* deep inside the Soviet Union.²³ It is alleged that Hekmatyar trains and arms Islamic parliamentary forces in Tajikistan. Most of the guns are reported to have gone to radical members of the Islamic Renaissance Party²⁴ which, together with the democrats, recently has forced the resignation of Rakhmon Nabyev, the elected communist Tajik President. Worried by the prospect of an influx of Mujahideen arms into Tajikistan's strong Islamic southern region, Russia,

22. *The Dawn* (Karachi), 2 February 1992.

23. *The Economist* (London), 25 June 1988, p. 16; Harry Gelman, *The Soviet Military Leadership and the Question of Soviet Deployment Retreats*, Rand Corporation, R-3664-AF, November 1988, p. 42.

24. *Newsweek* (New York), 24 August 1992, p. 26.

Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrghyzstan announced on 4 September 1992 that additional troops had been sent to police Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan.²⁵

Events in Mazar-i-Sharif have also created a dilemma for neighbouring Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. They would prefer northern Afghanistan to be governed by their own ethnic allies, rather than Pashtun Islamists but fear the demands by some Mujahideen radicals for a Greater Uzbekistan and a Greater Tajikistan. A disintegrated Afghanistan may hasten such ominous scenarios. But a stable and friendly Afghanistan might even help transform the entire region of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan into a zone of economic and political cooperation and prosperity. The Central Asian states, being land-locked, are most likely to re-open their traditional southern route to the sea, as Pakistan appears to be in desperate need to strengthen ties with them for trade that it expects to "compensate" for some of the economic slack created by dwindling foreign economic assistance. However, no significant trade between the Central Asian republics and Pakistan is possible without secure routes through Afghanistan.

China : China, a neighbouring country with a restive Muslim population, also could not remain nonchalant to the possible reverberation of developments in Afghanistan. In Xinjiang, the Western-most Chinese province bordering Central Asia, there is a strong underground separatist Islamic movement which has been backed by some Mujahideen leaders like Hekmatyar.²⁶ Since unrest among Muslim minority Uighurs of this Chinese province was brutally suppressed a few years ago, Beijing has been increasingly concerned over the prospect of an Islamic resurgence in its backyard. Furthermore, China also has much to fear from resurgent ethnic and

25. *FEER* (Hong Kong), 24 September 1992, p. 20.

26. *Asiaweek* (Hong Kong), 17 July 1992, p. 43.

religious movement in its border provinces of Tibet and Inner Mongolia now that the whole of Central Asia is in flux. Although the situation is not nemesis to China, it is worth reflecting that this is that China which successfully made the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan one of its three preconditions for normalising its relations with the former Soviet Union. Beijing wanted the Soviets out and preferred an independent and neutral communist regime in Kabul. A dismembered Afghanistan or the coming to power of an Islamic 'fundamentalist' regime in Kabul may make China uncomfortable.

Implications Beyond the Region

The resurrected Islamic Afghanistan has hinged the chain of Muslim countries, which stretch from the shores of the Atlantic to the borders of India and the steppes of Central Asia. Over the past few years, the West has tended to detect a scaring Islamic revivalist movement in some parts of this Muslim belt, indentifying terrorism, intolerance, and revolution for export as three scourges ambushing behind the East-West cultural divide. With the tumbling down of the Soviet empire, the West seems to be concerned whether Islamic "fundamentalism" may shape up as the next millennial threat to liberal democracy. And not only the Westerners are worried. M. J. Akbar, an Indian Muslim author, has argued that the next confrontation is definitely going to come from Muslim world. It is the sweep of the Islamic nations from the Maghreb to Pakistan that the struggle for a new world order will begin.²⁷ This is a sweeping prophecy. The Muslim Ummah is not monolithic, despite the existence of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. Perhaps, it is rather reflective of the schisms in Muslim ranks. The Muslim world remains such a patchwork carpet of sectarian beliefs, ethnic loyalties, and political structures that the struggle is for the most part within Muslims, or

27. *Time* (New York), 15 July 1992, p. 20.

between them. There is no centralised Muslim authority, political as well as theological power combined together, that would launch *Jihad* against the modern-day crusaders. Even the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which was otherwise satisfying to many Muslims across the world, could not effectively unravel the alignment pattern of the Muslim countries with the West. The number of Muslim countries in the international coalition, that was ranged against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, is a convincing demonstration of Muslim countries' varied interests and compulsions *vis-s-vis* the West.

However, the fact remains that the reaction of the West to the fall of communist regimes in Ethiopia and Afghanistan is understandably not the same. It depends on the nature of the successor regime and the location of the country concerned. The Americans wanted the Soviets out of Afghanistan and a broad-based government acceptable to its people, and not a radical Islamic regime in Kabul. With this end in view, the United States first fed and fostered the Mujahideen and in the wake of the end of the Cold War it joined forces with Russia in maligning, resisting, isolating, and dividing the Mujahideen, since it did not want to contribute to the creation of an Afghan regime that would strengthen the hands of Tehran. Russia also must be holding similar views on post-Najibullah Afghanistan with the added concern for the substantial minorities in Central Asia.

Strategically speaking, the new cluster of regional states, that is coming into being comprising eight Muslims states (nine if Turkey is included) may be of significance to the West, mainly the United States. The newly revived Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), may one day emerge as an economic and political bloc effectively competing with the West. The West, particularly the U.S. may find its security interests in the Middle East and South Asia in jeopardy if and when the ECO would be in a position to influence the strategic balance in these areas. Geographically, the ECO is not

complete without Afghanistan. Finally, an undemocratic and repressive regime in Kabul might outrage the Human Rights activists. Apart from concern for lives and freedom that might be in jeopardy, the West is likely to apprehend an influx of emigrants who may be forced out for lush fields in Europe and America.

CHALLENGES BEFORE THE THIRD AFGHAN REPUBLIC

The host of problems that Afghanistan is grappling with are varied in nature and scope. We have broadly categorised them as political, economic and socio-cultural.

Political

The interim Afghan government is reeling under the burden of political problems such as the lack of unity of leadership and purpose, the lack of a functioning political system and institutions, the ongoing civil war, the problems of disarming various armed groups, and even the ominous possibility of the country's disintegration. The common enemy in Afghanistan is no more there, but this country is no Vietnam and the Afghan leaders are no successors of Ho-Chi Minh as far as leadership and its commitment are concerned. The post-Najibullah Afghan leadership is not well-representative. The Mujahideen factions, led by Hekmatyar, Saayaf, and Khales, have been practically left out in the lurch. And, so is the part of the Afghan army that remained loyal to Najibullah and would not join hands with the Mujahideen. The ruling conglomeration itself is riven by dissensions. All in all, the country is being torn apart by ethnic, sectarian, and personal rivalries, and a kind of overlord culture.

From 1747 to 1978, Afghanistan was run as a virtual tribal confederacy preserving an uneasy balance between the southern Pashtun tribes and non-Pashtun groups elsewhere in the country. The domination of the majority Pashtuns over the minority ethnic groups like the Tajiks, Uzbeks etc., has always been resented. As mentioned

earlier, the post-communist combination of forces in Afghanistan is in favour of the minorities. For the first time in Afghan history, the two most powerful leaders of the country do not belong to the majority ethnic group. Masud and Dostam formed an alliance and they now control the largest military and political forces in the country. A return to the *status quo* in Afghanistan is, therefore, unlikely. Such an 'undue' position of the minorities has fuelled tensions among the Pashtuns. Hekmatyar is now appealing to Pashtun nationalism by accusing Masud of being an Iranian agent and a "creature" of Dostam's Uzbek militia.²⁸ Hekmatyar has refused to join the government until this militia leaves Kabul. Hardline Pashtun generals may also be fearful of the coalition between the Tajik-Uzbek elements in the Mujahideen and the army. The Pashtun generals might become the crucial destabilising factor if they join hands with Hekmatyar who has been ousted from any prominence in the battle-field by Musud. Hence, for the Kabul government it remains a great challenge how to contain the rivalry among different ethnic groups.

The Afghan government is also facing the challenge of sectarian tension between the Shias and the Sunnis. They often engage in battles with each other. For example, it is reported that a Shia Mujahideen group backed by Iran, Islamic Coalition Council of Afghanistan, or *Hezbe-i-Wahadat*, waged battles against Islamic Unity, or *Ittehad-i-Islami*, a Sunni force supported by Saudi Arabia, for control of Kabul's western neighbourhoods. This Shia faction is also pressing for greater minority representation in local and national administrative bodies.²⁹ It is a challenge before the government in that it has to satisfy them without hurting the sensitivities of the other ethnic groups.

The Afghan leadership is riddled with personal ambitions and rivalries. Hekmatyar's representatives in Peshawar had proposed at

28. *FEER* (Hong Kong), 14 May 1992, p. 12.

29. *The International Herald Tribune*, 28 July 1992.

the meeting on 20 April 1992 with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that while other Mujahideen groups could be given two seats each on the *Jihad* Council, his group should be allocated at least six. Masud's group is said to have countered by proposing its leader's name as the head of the Council.³⁰ Hekmatyar refused to join the new Islamic government, except on his own terms. He then demanded the resignation of the interim President and longtime rival Mojaddedi and claimed the right to make cabinet appointments. Hekmatyar also called for the expulsion from Kabul Dostam's northern militia. On every point, Hekmatyar was vehemently rebuffed by Masud.³¹

It is often said that the prevailing chaotic situation in Afghanistan might lapse into disintegration.³² Some commentators even predicted that there might be created at least four states out of the present Afghan state. The permanent partitioning, according to them, seems to go along ethnic and sectarian lines. According to the scenario, Dostam may carve up a separate Uzbek northern state which would be a secular entity and which would act as buffer for Central Asia against the spread of Islamic 'fundamentalism' by the Pashtuns in the south and Iran in the west. Hekmatyar is reportedly lobbying for an interim Pashtun state in the south, which would eventually impose its will on the rest of the country. Masud is supposed to have a dream of carving up the north-eastern parts of Afghanistan and create a separate state for the Afghan Tajiks. And, the fourth one goes to the Iranian-influenced Hazaras of the Shia sect, living in the central and western parts of the country.³³

30. *FEER* (Hong Kong), 30 April 1992, p.11.

31. *Newsweek* (New York), 18 May 1992, p. 30.

32. *FEER*, (Hong Kong), 24 September 1992, p. 18; See for instance, *The Economist* (London), 25 April 1992, pp. 13-14; *The Dawn* (Karachi), 4 April 1992.

33. *FEER*, (Hong Kong), 24 September 1992, p. 18.

Dostam has reportedly visited Turkey and neighbouring Uzbekistan apparently with the purpose of gauging support for a separate state for his Uzbek people.³⁴ It is argued here that such a state is not likely to emerge. Although the state is expected to act as a buffer against the Islamic onslaught from the south and west, its impact on Uzbekistan is uncertain. In the event of a hypothetical merger of two Uzbek states, Dostam is likely to lose more, and the consequences of the 'unification' would not be palatable to the non-Uzbeks in Uzbekistan. Furthermore, though the hypothetical Uzbek entity may serve as a strategic outpost to some outside powers, the question of viability of a resource-poor patch of land may discourage all concerned, if at all, to dream of a separate Uzbek state in Afghanistan. What the Uzbek General has in mind is probably to gain acceptability to all in Kabul, given his past association with Najibullah and his regime, and also to grab a larger share of the pie of power. His main objective seems to be to ensure much larger autonomy for the region inhabited by Uzbeks within the context of one Afghanistan.

Contrary to popular perceptions, Masud does not need a separate mini state for him and his people. His war-time credential have made him a national hero, and he could remain a leading light of his country in his own right and that seems what he is aspiring for. Although Masud is dead against a return to the *status quo* of Pashtun domination, he sees reason to an equitable sharing of power by all ethnic groups. And, that arrangement would guarantee the Afghan Tajiks their aspired role in the national life. It should also be mentioned that the *entente* between Masud and Dostam is purely tactical and tenuous. Masud is not likely to talk secessionist, lest he will be in need of a 'Pashtun card' to be played off against Dostam. He may be envious of a 'Uzbekland' under Dostam, because the latter will appear to be reaping the harvest in which he did not invest. Masud,

34. *Ibid.*

therefore, needs a larger canvas, which is Afghanistan, to contain the former communist General, should the situation so warrant.

Although a formidable force to reckon with, Hekmatyar does not represent the interests of all Pashtuns. As mentioned earlier, there are intra-Pashtun differences which may stand in his way to speak for all his fellow ethnic brethren. What Hekmatyar actually wants is to ensure the share of the Pashtun majority in the present dispensation and a leading role for himself in it, which the *Hizb-e Islami* leader feels are threatened. A separate state for the Shia, Persian-speaking, Hazaras is inconceivable, because in that case, none of the other three is going to welcome an Iranian-controlled state and Tehran's likely push further east. In fact, Iran itself may not like it, given its impact on Iran's own Baluch and Pashtun minorities.

What is more discouraging to secessionist tendencies is the attitudes of the countries that border on Afghanistan. If the patchwork, that Afghanistan is, were to come apart, the disintegration could spread beyond Afghanistan. By all standards, Afghanistan is now a tinder box; if ignited, the neighbours are sure to get caught up in the blazing ethnic fire. As a result of disintegration of Afghanistan, the integrity of Pakistan, Iran, the CARs, and even India might be threatened. This is a scenario that is alarming not only to the possible 'victim states' but also to the whole international community, which will exert influence on various Afghan parties to come to a negotiated settlement.

State-building, like nation-building, in Afghanistan is a formidable challenge. Afghanistan is a country where the process of developing political institution has not gone uninterrupted. The country has lived through monarchy, authoritarianism and totalitarianism, during which state structures and political institutions were tailored to suit the interests of the rulers in Kabul. There has never been a permanent consensus on whether the state would be federal or

unitary, Islamic or secular, moderate or radical, communist or democratic. The Islamic regime has hardly anything to build on in this regard. Furthermore, the incumbent Kabul government itself and other power brokers in Afghanistan do not as yet seem to have a blueprint that may be acceptable to all Afghan factions. While Hekmatyar seeks to maintain Pashtun hegemony, Masud wants equitable power-sharing between Pashtuns and the other minority ethnic groups, by means of a meaningful federal system.³⁵ Hekmatyar holds radical views on Islam whereas Mojaddedi, Rabbani, and Masud entertain moderate one. Masud's views on the role of women in society are liberal as is his belief that minority sects should be allowed to practise their own brand of faith.³⁶ Another challenge to the Kabul government's Islamic measures is likely to come from secular forces in Afghan society. The rump of the old order may also die hard. Conversely, Islamisation of Afghanistan, if it is at all on the government's agenda is not going to have a smooth sailing.

Meanwhile, the fullscale hostilities, which broke out between two rival Mujahideen sides - Hekmatyar and the provisional government in Kabul, continue punctuated by temporary ceasefire agreements. Hekmatyar argued that he had attacked the Kabul government because of its reliance on the formerly pro-Najibullah Uzbek militia and because Rabbani has been too slow in purging his forces of military officers appointed by the former communist regime. Hekmatyar's critics noted that he also had allied with former-communist officers who share his Pashtun nationalism. Rabbani asserted that the attacks were intended primarily to destabilize the government and dismissed Hekmatyar and his representative from the coalition government's ruling council. On 16 August 1992 President Rabbani also fired his Prime Minister, Abdul Sabur Fareed, who was only appointed on 6

35. *The Times of India* (Editorial), 18 August 1992.

36. *FEER*, (Hong Kong), 7 May 1992, pp. 12-13.

July of the same year. Fareed, who is incidentally a Tajik, represented Hekmatyar's *Hezbe Islami* in the Afghan coalition government. Other Hekmatyar supporters in the government, including Deputy Defence Minister Abdul Hakeem, stepped down.³⁷ The Rabbani government might also encounter some resistance from some quarters loyal to the old order.

The problem of disarming various armed Afghan groups may prove rather tricky for the interim leadership. There are a number of commanders, who are holding groups of armed men under their command, and have virtually divided the country into independent political fiefdoms. General Dostam, who commands virtually an army of 100,000 militiamen, is in effect, overlording the northern parts of Afghanistan. His men in Kabul, along with Masud's are propping up the fragile provisional government.³⁸ Masud, who is now Defence Minister of Afghanistan, has his own force numbering about 40,000 men. Masud's writ runs in the north-eastern parts of his country. Hemkmatyar, whose followers' number now is not known, received the bulk and best-quality weapons funded by the United States and Saudi Arabia. He is understood to have retained large supplies of these weapons which could keep him well armed for another two years. He is also reportedly getting reinforcements at present.³⁹ Eastern Afghanistan is Hekmatyar's domain. This overlord culture is impeding the growth of democratic norms and ethos in the Afghan polity and society, and is sustaining the present chaotic setup by means of

37. *Asiaweek*, (Hong Kong), 28 August 1992, p. 29, *The Times of India*, 17 August 1992.

38. Dostam's men are leaving Kabul. It is, however, not clear whether this is for the government to meet Hekmatyar's demand or to redeploy them elsewhere for some other purpose after the new regime's having felt confident of holding the post without the former communist militia men.

39. *The Guardian Weekly* (London), 30 August 1992, p. 20 FEER (Hong Kong), 14 May 1992, p. 12.

bargaining power that mainly depends on military might. Disarming and demobilising the forces, meagre though, loyal to the former regime, also remain a knotty problem.

The absorption of the disarmed Mujahideen fighters and the Najibullah loyalists into the mainstream of the Afghan polity and society is really a stupendous task to accomplish. What will happen to a half generation of young men who have had only one occupation-waging war? They lack both skills and interest required for their occupations. If no jobs, they may be tempted not only to join private militias, but they may also take recourse to self-employment such as banditry.

Irrespective of the complexion of the parties involved in the civil war in Afghanistan, it is the common man who has been suffering the most; it is the country's infrastructure that is being demolished; and it is the peace and stability that is being sacrificed at the alter of this mindless situation. And, of course, absence of peace and stability at this juncture in Afghanistan means no rehabilitation of more than 5 million refugees, most of whom are still in Pakistan and Iran, and no reconstruction of this war-ravaged country. In fact, the current bouts of the mind-boggling madness in the tragic Afghan saga are causing more damage in Kabul than ever before. The 'battle for Kabul' has virtually wreaked havoc on the city, which was an "oasis of relative calm"⁴⁰ even at the height of the civil war against Najibullah and his predecessors. Many people have been killed and wounded, many dwelling houses, shops, and installations damaged or even collapsed. All this has sapped not only the supply line from outside but also the civic amenities like running water and electricity supply, resulting in untold miseries and an outbreak of various diseases. Hospitals and chemist shops are without medicines, or, at best, in short supply.

40. *The Guardian Weekly* (London), 30 August 1992, p 20; *The International Herald Tribune*, 24 August 1992.

Kabul has also become a city of anarchy, as the city has been overtaken by the evils of theft, thuggery, mugging, banditry, looting, raping, and various other acts of criminal nature. This has also triggered off an internal refugee problem as many Afghans are forced to leave Kabul and take shelter elsewhere in the country. Infighting in Kabul has been so intense that even President Rabbani could not go on a scheduled visit to Pakistan on 12 August 1992. His plane could not take off due to rocket fires at the Kabul airport by the dissident forces loyal to Hekmatyar.⁴¹

The inability of the regime in Kabul to end the raging civil war and to put the country back on the track of stability, harmony, and progress is likely to wane people's trust and confidence in it, ultimately leading to loss of its legitimacy to remain in power. This is, indeed, a big challenge to those who are now making the running in Kabul.

Economic and Socio-cultural

The clash between two socio-economic, cultural, value and belief systems, fuelled by fourteen years of civil war, has reduced Afghanistan's economy and society to a rickety state. The post-Najib chaotic situation in the country is rendering them still more frail.

The Afghan economy is, indeed in total shambles. Its infrastructure has been reduced to rubbles and the various sectors of the economy stymied. Industrial production has nosedived; service sector is in appalling condition; government revenue has critically dwindled; export earnings are shrinking and import bills are dramatically soaring; remittances are sharply falling; budget deficit is alarmingly increasing; and prices are uncontrollably skyrocketing and inflation is spiralling.⁴²

41. *Asiaweek*, (Hong Kong), 28 August 1992, p. 29.

42. See for details, *Asia Yearbook, 1992*, (Hong Kong 1992), p. 72.

Agriculture, the mainstay of Afghan economy, was badly hit by the war. People fled the countryside and could not cultivate their land. Those who stayed back could hardly work the land due to aerial and ground bombardments and mines. The war even disturbed previous economic patterns; for example, poppy cultivation has brought money to the remotest areas. The irrigation system, an essential precondition for agricultural activities in an arid land like Afghanistan, was badly battered due to war. About 500 thousand hectares of land under the irrigation system were damaged. Several posts that were set up to monitor the flow of water and record water level became non-operational. Damage was also caused to about 200 thousand hectares of forest because of Napalm bombs.⁴³ In Afghanistan, road transport is the most important means of mobility for social, economic, and commercial activities. During the war, about 33 per cent of the partly paved roads and 25 per cent of the total paved roads have been damaged.⁴⁴

The question of ownership, a cardinal pillar of an economic system, is going to be tremendously problematic. Who would take over the mills and factories and other private properties that were appropriated by the Afghan socialist state? Who would redistribute the land taken by the state from the big land owner? One scholar has appropriately highlighted the problem involving land ownership by raising a couple of questions: "Once the refugees start returning, given the weak status of the governmental structure, the country will face a two-fold problem in this respect: (i) how will the survivors or inheritors of the land owners, already eliminated, assume land ownership; and (ii) how much the Mujahideen who have become *de*

43. See Fazal-Ur Rahman, "Pakistan's Role in the Reconstruction of Afghanistan," in *Afghanistan: Looking to the Future*, Seminar Report, The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, 1991, p. 96.

44. Engineer Abdul Rahim, "Reconstruction of Afghanistan: Problems and Prospects," in *Afghanistan: Looking to the Future*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

facto owners of the land, will be convinced to give up the acquired property?"⁴⁵ The same is applicable to industries including the service sector. As a matter of fact, this is not only an economic problem, rather, it has also political and social ramifications.

The task of rehabilitating the more than 5 million Afghan refugees and rebuilding the shattered economy and infrastructure is literally herculean. This is going to involve colossal sums and human efforts. Afghanistan lacks in both. According to one estimate, the economic losses, sustained by Afghanistan during the years 1980-90, are US \$ 644.8 billion. The Soviet experts in Kabul calculated in 1988 the cost of rebuilding the shattered Afghan economy at US \$ 10 billion. 'Operation Salam', the UN Secretary General's initiative launched in May 1988, appealed to the world community to donate US \$ 1.16 billion for the first phase in the rebuilding efforts.⁴⁶ The current turmoil in Afghanistan, with its attendant destruction, has only increased the cost of rehabilitation of the Afghan refugees and Mujahideen. The Mujahideen government's clarion call for foreign assistance has largely gone unheeded. Due to shortage of food and other essentials, Kabul is close to starvation, a situation the new regime can overlook only at its peril.

The years of conflict have upset the social balance. The Marxist-Leninist political organisation of state, its various organs and institution, and the education system have created a new middle class which has replaced the traditional elites in both urban and rural Afghanistan. Most of the intelligentsia in Kabul have been trained under the soviet-influenced education system, while the traditional elites had their education in Pakistan or in various Western countries. The rift, which was growing between the two middle classes under the

45. Sabahuddin Kushkaki, "Repatriation of Afghan Refugees: An Afghan Perspective," in *Afghanistan: Looking to the Future*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

46. Fazal-Ur Rahman, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

communist regime,⁴⁷ now is going to widen the other way under the Islamic regime in Kabul. The same will happen with the competing trends of Islamic influence on and secularisation, of action, ideas, thoughts, and attitude of individuals and social forces. On the other hand, widespread illiteracy is going to remain a major Afghan problem.

Troubled days seem ahead for educated, professional women who wonder whether they will be able to continue studying and working. Defining the role of women in Afghan society is a pressing political and social problem for the ruling coalition in Kabul.⁴⁸ Clash of interests and value systems on this issue is almost inevitable between the liberal and radical forces in Afghanistan.

As a result of internal mass migration and emigration there has been a socio-psychological transformation of the refugees. They have been urbanised in manners and attitude and disconnected them from agriculture-related and rural-based vocation. The rehabilitation of the war-handicapped children will also be an uphill task.⁴⁹ All in all, the challenge before the Kabul government is how to thoroughly restructure the society peacefully with a view to ensuring social harmony and tranquility under the new dispensation.

Economic challenges facing the Afghan government also have external origin. As indicated in the preceding discussion, Afghanistan is no longer a Cold War issue. The great powers seem to have lost the geo-strategic interest they once used to have in Afghanistan and they seem to be keeping a low-profile over the developments in Kabul. This attitude is not encouraging to the new Afghan regime particularly as it relates to the prospect of economic and technical assistance from

47. Olivier Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64.

48. *FEER*, (Hong Kong), 4 June 1992, pp. 28-29.

49. Sabahuddin Kushkaki, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

the major donor countries. The United States, which might have felt rebuffed by the Mujahideen who scuttled the Washington-backed UN peace plan for Afghanistan, is likely to take a harder attitude on human rights record and democratisation process in Afghanistan as well as its external alignment patterns before considering a large aid package for the war-ravaged country. Actually, the aid pledge by the West as a whole may not be that reassuring due to recession, and may be shared out by other needy spots like Somalia and the East European countries. It is, thus a great challenge before the new Afghan leadership how to raise the money in order to underwrite the stupendous tasks ahead.

The fragility of the new Kabul regime has created a power vacuum in Afghanistan, triggering off a scramble of competing regional powers for sphere of influence. The rival ambitions of these powers could exacerbate the prevailing situation in Afghanistan as well as jeopardise its stability. The challenge to the regime in Kabul is how to balance these influencing factors and to ensure the country's peace, stability, and security.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The communist rule in Afghanistan collapsed in the third week of April 1992 with the forced resignation of President Najibullah. The *Saur* Revolution was perhaps the least popular revolution the communists have ever staged in this century. The impact of the end of the Cold War, coupled with internal dissensions within the Afghan government and the army, therefore, rendered such a regime untenable. The Afghan Mujahideen, who had fought for fourteen years against this regime, took advantage of the situation by forging alliance with the defectors and capturing power in Kabul. The interim Mujahideen government has declared Afghanistan an Islamic Republic. The implications of the change of regime in Kabul are already being felt internally and regionally. The new Kabul government has not been

able to ensure a peaceful transition to a stable order in the country. The country's civil war has not ended, rather it has assumed a new dimension with the outbreak of intense Mujahideen infighting. The *Sharia* laws, that have been enacted, are affecting the secular forces, and the educated professional women. The Islamic nature of the Afghan regime is also causing concern in the neighbouring countries, including India and China. The radical Islamic forces in these countries may receive arms and training from some Mujahideen factions and they may take recourse to destabilising their governments.

The collapse of the communist regime of Najibullah has augured well for Pakistan and Iran; but not so for India, the CARs and China. The new regime in Kabul may be susceptible to influence from Islamabad and Tehran. The present friendly Afghan regime has apparently resolved Pakistan's two-front security dilemma - Pakistan's hemmed in position between hostile India and Afghanistan. The foreign policy orientation of the new Afghan government is also likely to have varied implications on the neighbouring countries. Contrary to popular perception, the fallout of the emergence of an Islamic regime in Afghanistan on the West, particularly the United States, is not likely to be immediate and extensive. Although it has been argued in the paper that despite ethnic and sectarian squabbling Afghanistan is not likely to fall apart, the neighbouring countries seem concerned about the impact of a disintegrated Afghanistan.

The myriad of problems and challenges facing Afghanistan are basically related to the systemic change, the composition of the provisional government, the absence of a well-conceived all-Afghan socio-economic and political system and to the ongoing civil war. These formidable problems and challenges require intense efforts by all important Afghan factions to overcome them. The crux of the current conflict in Afghanistan is how to share power and devise a viable political order in the country. The problem of power-sharing

involves not only individuals but also the whole range of ethnic groups and sectarian interests. Afghanistan, being a diverse, pluralistic, and strategically encircled country, has no option but to establish and maintain a stable polity that would accommodate competing hopes and aspirations in the society and ensure stability, peace, and prosperity of the country. A workable combination of federal, democratic, Islamic values and non-aligned principle may be helpful in evolving such an order. The process would, of course, take a long time, a period in which Afghanistan may have to live with greater or lesser degree of instability.