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AFGHAN MIGRATION: THREAT OR OPPORTUNITY FOR PAKISTAN?

Abstract

Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees over three decades now. While around 3.5 million Afghans have repatriated to their country in recent years, around an estimated 1.7 million registered refugees, are still residing in Pakistan.¹ There have been many studies about Afghan refugees burdening the economy of Pakistan and becoming a security threat for the host. However, one does not come across much research enquiring whether they have actually been a threat or an opportunity. Largely perceived as threat, one cannot overlook how refugees provide political or economic opportunity for a host state and how they contribute positively to the social structures. Most writings about refugees highlight the tribulations they create for the receiving state; however, the governments do not present the flip side of refugees, neither to their own people or the international community regarding the prospects they bring for the host. This paper analyzes the threat and opportunity dimensions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Why the refugee issue as a threat has been highlighted whereas its opportunity under narrated? Have the refugees been an economic burden or asset? Have refugees contributed to social ills of Pakistani society or have they impacted positively? Answering all these questions is expected to provide a balanced view of Afghan refugees in Pakistan in the paper.

1. Introduction

Afghans and Pakistanis have been moving across the Durand Line (Pak-Afghan border) since time immemorial, and have never been considered as refugees. They were termed as seasonal migrants who came with their family and stayed till the winters were over in Afghanistan. This movement was never controversial and was not seen in the refugee framework. It was the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 that led to massive influxes into

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¹**Nasreen Ghufraan** (2009), *Afghans in Pakistan: Plight, Predicament and the Way Forward*, Roundtable Conference, Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad.

Pakistan. This was forced migration as distinct from the earlier movements across the border.

Pakistan is not a Contracting Party of the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, (hereafter referred to as the 1951 UN Convention), therefore, initially it had difficulties in housing large number of refugees without any legal protection. Politically, the country was receptive to Afghan refugees and welcomed them. It justified its action in providing shelter and refuge to these refugees on the basis of religion (Islam) and humanitarian grounds. The government opined that Islamic duty requires them to offer safe haven to fellow Muslims, facing persecution in their home countries. In comparison with many asylum countries, Pakistan has been liberal as it has allowed Afghan refugees freedom of movement within the country, where they can work and do small businesses to earn their livelihoods. This openness on the part of Pakistan government reflected that Afghan refugees were initially not considered a threat to either their security or economy. Pakistan's Afghan policy played a major role in welcoming millions of Afghans on its soil and using these refugees for political and strategic purposes.

Barring introduction and conclusion, the paper is divided into four sections. The second section discusses Pakistan's Afghan policy toward refugees. The third section assesses the local perception of the Afghan refugees. The fourth section evaluates whether Afghans have been an economic burden or not and lastly how they have impacted on the society. An objective and balanced analysis of both the perspectives will enable the policy makers in both Pakistan and Afghanistan to chalk out a pragmatic policy to resolve the problem of refugees.

2. Afghan Refugees: Strategic Asset for Pakistan's Afghan Policy

Afghan refugees pouring into Pakistan through the long, permeable frontier provided an opportunity to policy makers to pursue their desired policy in Afghanistan with renewed vigor. The refugees came to be regarded a strategic asset and a foreign policy tool utilized in the larger interest of the host country. The humanitarian crisis turned into a political blessing as refugees came to attract large foreign assistance, leading to aid inflows which were used by Gen. Zia-ul-Haq to contain Soviets in Afghanistan and pursue his Islamist agenda by supporting the mujahideen resistance. Commonly perceived as a security concern, Afghan refugees were said to have placed an enormous financial burden on the limited resources of Pakistan, however, the country opened itself and welcomed massive numbers to settle in the adjoining provinces of NWFP (now known as Khyber Pukhtunkhwa) and Balochistan. Pakistan accepted the responsibility of providing these afflicted people with shelter and basic necessities of life as a humanitarian and Islamic duty. The generous help received from friendly countries and international humanitarian organizations,

particularly the UNHCR and the International Red Cross(IRC) was deeply appreciated.

The military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq was politically fragile and lacked legitimacy to confront the situation alone and without any external support. Moreover, India's friendship with Afghanistan further complicated the situation. The Soviets had supported both Afghanistan and India in their disputes with Pakistan. General Zia cashed the situation by playing the 'frontline state'² and supporting the Afghan Islamic resistance forces against the socialist regime of Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Mujahideens were seen as allies by the US in containing the Soviets in Afghanistan. The political and strategic interests of Pakistan, the US and the mujahideen converged— undoing

² Rasul Bakhsh Rais (1997), *War without Winners: Afghanistan's Uncertain Transition after the Cold War*. Oxford University Press, Karachi. 236-238

the Soviet intervention of 1979 and installing a regime in Kabul, catering to the needs of all the parties involved. The partnership between the US and Pakistan was one of many instances of cooperation serving complementary interests. For the United States, it served the primary purpose of expanding the scope of the policy of containment; for Pakistan it served primarily the purpose of increasing its political, military and economic potential vis-à-vis its neighbor, i.e., India and the Soviet-backed Kabul government. General Zia, who was the architect of the new alignment, explained Pakistan's motives in cooperating with the US in these words, "Our main and prime objectives are to keep out the Soviet Union and Afghanistan in the north and to safeguard the safety and security of Pakistan from Indians in the east."³

The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) started supporting the resistance covertly through its ally— Pakistan. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency became the main arbiter of Pakistan's Afghan policy as funds were channeled through it. During the years 1982-1987, the United States had provided \$7.4 billion economic and military assistance to Pakistan to fund a massive military build-up. The modernization program included improved warning and communication systems, anti-tank missiles, ground attack aircraft, tanks, and armored personnel carriers.⁴ Pakistan's security was further enhanced by the emergence of a broad coalition of international forces supporting Islamabad's effort to expel the Soviet forces from Afghanistan.⁵ Their goal according to the late Pakistani Prime Minister, Benezir Bhutto, was to "radicalize the influence of religious factions within Afghanistan."⁶ Furthermore, the international assistance which began to pour into Pakistan for the Afghan refugees and mujahideen helped General Zia to stabilize his military regime, neutralize his domestic opponents and assume a central position in regional power politics.

Pakistan tried to organize political parties of Afghans⁷ on its soil and the assistance went to these parties through the ISI that further distributed the aid in

³ A.Z. Hilal (2005), *US-Pakistan Relationship: Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan (US Foreign Policy and Conflict in the Muslim World*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, England. 193

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *War without Winners: Afghanistan's Uncertain Transition after the Cold War*. 38

⁶ Khushal Arsala & Stephen Zunes. "The US and Afghan Tragedy" posted February 18, 2009 www. fpif.org retrieved August 20, 2010

⁷ Mahaz-Milli-yi Islami-yi Afghanistan (National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, NIFA), headed by Pir Sayyid Ahmed Gilani; Jabha-yi Nijat –I-Milli-yi-Afghanistan (Afghanistan National Liberation Front, ANLF) led by Sibghatullah Mujaddidi; Harakat-I-Inqilab-I-Islami-yi-Afghanistan (Movement of the Islamic Revolution, HAR) led by Maulwi Muhammed Nabi Muhammedi; Hizb-I-Islami-yi-Afghanistan (Islamic Party of Afghanistan, Hikmatyar, HIH) led by Gulbadin Hikmatyar; Hizb-I-Islami-yi-Afghanistan (Islamic Party of Afghanistan, Khalis, HIK) led by Yunus Khalis; Jamiat-yi-

the refugee camps. Political analysts criticized Pakistan's grooming of Afghan resistance parties and perceived it as a negative policy on the part of the military regime. Before December 1979, the Pakistani based Afghan parties and refugee organizations had no public following to speak of. In order to have support from the refugees, these parties brought in a new law which required that all Afghan refugees should register with one Afghan political party or another. As a rule, a refugee had to be registered with one of the parties to get food rations. People who were unregistered did not get rations and thus could starve or have an extremely difficult time keeping themselves and their children fed.⁸ The refugee camps became "places where the Mujahideen (guerrillas) could return for rest and see their families", writes Brig Mohammad Yousaf in his book, *The Bear Trap*. He further declared that the camps were "a huge reservoir of potential recruits for jihad."⁹

A considerable number of Afghan refugee orphans entered the network of madrassas of the NWFP, especially in tribal areas where they were supported as charity by Islamic organizations. The Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI), a long established Pakistani political party led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, established madrassas specifically for the orphans of the Afghan jihad. While on surface, it seemed a humanitarian act on the part of the JUI, but it used these very madrassas to serve and further the political interests of the party. The JUI had its stronghold in the frontier Pushtun and Baloch regions where it regularly secured a greater vote in elections than did the more prominent Jamat-I-Islami founded by Maulana Abu Ala Maudidi.¹⁰

At the same time, Pakistan propagated that the military presence of the Soviets in neighboring Afghanistan produced a threat and made it insecure vis-à-vis a super power, which was believed to pursue an expansionist policy in the region.¹¹ Intervention by a large powerful neighbor into a small and weak country was in violation of the norms of international law; secondly, the disappearance of a century old buffer state and the advance of a superpower to the Pakistan border made the Soviet threat more credible; thirdly, the ambivalent Indian response to the Soviet action increased Pakistan security concerns and

Afghanistan (Islamic Society of Afghanistan, JIA) led by Burhanuddin Rabbani and the last of the seven parties was

Ittihad-I-Islami Bara-yi Azadi-yi-Afghanistan (Islamic Union for the Freedom of Afghanistan, ITT) led by Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.

⁸ Raja Anwar (1988), *The Tragedy of Afghanistan: A First Hand Account*. Verso London-New York. 238

⁹ Azhar Hassan. "Refugee Crisis: Revisiting Afghan Diaspora", Pak Institute for Peace Studies, July 30, 2007

¹⁰ Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby (1998), *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx and Mujahid*. Westview Press-Pak Book Corporation, Pakistan. 179

¹¹ Amin Saikal and William Maley eds. (1989), *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1989 p.531

fourthly, the influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan and Iran made it prone to Soviet attacks.¹² This sense of insecurity was compounded by its own ethno-linguistic divisions (the Punjabis, Sindhis, Pushtuns and Balochis), which have left an indelible impact on its political and social structures. These divisions have exposed the country to several externally backed secessionist threats, particularly by Pushtuns and Balochis, who had been supported by Afghanistan in the context of the country's border dispute with it.¹³

Therefore, the spillover security effects of the Soviet war in Afghanistan were there due to the presence of refugees and guerrilla fighters. However, looked at from a different angle, the security threat was there even if refugees had not come to Pakistan. Given the historically "free" character of the tribal areas and the porous border, Pakistan was in no position either to stop the inflow of refugees or to effectively control the movement of guerrillas from and to Afghanistan. The active military involvement of a superpower in support of a narrow-based regime increasingly hostile to Pakistan presented difficult security problems.¹⁴

The threat factor was highlighted to receive political and economic support for mujahideens, who were then supported by refugees. Thus refugees came to be used in advancing its political goals of Afghan policy. The security risks and costs were conveniently ignored during this period. Neither the authorities nor the general public considered them a major security threat. Rather they perceived the refugees as 'insecure and vulnerable' populace who needed Pakistan's and the international community's protection.

Although the termination in February 1989 of direct Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan removed the security threat to Pakistan, the unfinished war continued to occupy a central place on Islamabad's diplomatic agenda. New streams of Afghan refugees trickled into Pakistan as the internal conflict intensified after the Soviet withdrawal. As long as the Najibullah regime remained in power, Pakistan continued to support its removal through the Afghan resistance, and continued to bear the burden of refugees.¹⁵ Most of these refugees were politically connected to the various competing resistance parties and had direct access to arms.

Taliban force, a creation of madrassas took over Kabul in 1996. Pakistan's recognition of the Taliban regime led to its political isolation not only in the

¹² Agha Shahi (1987), "Pakistan's Relations with United States." in *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan*, edited by Hafeez Malik; Macmillan Press, London..370-375

¹³ Nasreen Ghufraan (2009), 'Pushtun Ethnonationalism and the Taliban Insurgency in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan' *Asian Survey*, Vol.XLIX, No.6 November/December, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1095-1099

¹⁴ *War Without Winners*. .237

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 239

region but also internationally. Pakistan's relations with Iran came under great strain, as the Sunni dominated Taliban were not liked by the Ayatollahs of Iran. Russia and Central Asian Republics (CARs) were concerned over the extreme religious views of Taliban. The possibility of Taliban's rigid religious values spilling over into Pakistan increased. Pakistan recognized Taliban in the hope that peace would return to Afghanistan, and that others would follow suit. They further believed that the route to Central Asia would open and the Afghan refugees would start going back to their country. Unfortunately none of these assumptions came true. During this period, Pak-US relations nose-dived. Osama bin Ladin and his Al-Qaeda network operating in Afghanistan, became the target of USA. Taliban were condemned for harboring Al-Qaeda. Pakistan's connection with Afghanistan during Taliban's rule earned her worldwide condemnation, which it could not afford politically.¹⁶

Pakistan continued to support the Taliban politically and militarily in an effort to establish a friendly, if not client, Pushtun-based regime in Afghanistan. Pakistan's long-standing policy of supporting Pushtun political forces in Afghanistan was generated from a belief that such a government could provide Pakistan with strategic depth vis-à-vis India and quell Pushtun nationalist forces at home. The concept of "strategic-depth" has been much debated and criticized but even the present army chief General Ashfaq Pervaz Kiani stated in February 2010 that, "we want strategic depth in Afghanistan."¹⁷ This reflects that the concept is still very much alive in the military circles, and that Afghanistan remains strategically important for Pakistan.

Pakistan joined hands with the US in its war against terrorism after the 9/11 terrorists attacks, thereby changing its pro-Taliban policy. Taliban were soon ousted from power and a transitional government of Hamid Karzai supported both by the US and Pakistan was installed in December 2001 through the Bonn Agreement in Germany. Between mid 2000 and early 2001, the largest influx of Afghan refugees in several years, an estimated 170,000 new arrivals – crossed into Pakistan. As the influx developed, Pakistani officials feared that the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and the effects of the worst drought to hit that country in 30 years might result in a much larger number of Afghans heading to Pakistan than actually arrived. That fear was exacerbated by Pakistan's concerns about its faltering economy, resentment toward the international community for its diminished interest and assistance to Afghan refugees, changing attitude of locals towards refugees by and the appointment of Iftikhar Hussain Shah as governor of NWFP, who was dubbed to have anti-refugee sentiments. The combination of these factors resulted in what a UN refugee official called an

¹⁶ Derek Brown (2001), "What the Pakistan Papers Say," <http://media.guardian.co.uk/press-review/> September 21, retrieved January 6, 2005

¹⁷ Zahid Hussein, "Pakistan Spells Out Terms for Regional Stability." *Dawn*, February 2, 2010

‘irreversible and qualitative’ change in Pakistani government attitudes, policies, and actions toward Afghan refugees.¹⁸

However, after the passage of 9 years, peace and tranquility has not returned to Afghanistan despite an elected president and parliament. The neo-Taliban insurgency continues, which has sympathizers among the residual Afghan population in Pakistan. Afghan refugees who are supportive of the insurgency are being exploited by various agencies (both Pakistanis and international) to pursue their anti-American agenda — removal of international forces from Afghanistan and the puppet regime of Hamid Karzai. Pakistan started adopting strict measures against the refugees in the wake of these developments, and has been pursuing a steady policy of Afghan repatriation with UNHCR’s assistance since 2002, but there is no denying the fact that these refugees have been used as a foreign policy tool by Pakistan in making alliances and pursuing its objectives in Afghanistan. The strategic importance of refugees may have waned over the years, but it has not vanished and therefore is on and off used as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the international community and Afghan government.

3. Local Perception of Afghan Refugees— Threat or Opportunity?

Most of the Afghan refugees fleeing from their country settled in two provinces of Pakistan — NWFP and Balochistan. They settled in other parts too, but these two provinces housed majority of the refugee camps. Friction between the local and refugee population has been expected ever since the massive influx took place. However, the local population has demonstrated no major hostility so far. There was more tolerance of refugees in 1980s in comparison with the 1990s. They were not perceived as economic or social threat. They were treated as Muslim brethren who were in need of support and refuge, and the locals willingly provided these to the displaced population.

In a nationally representative survey conducted in April 1980, 87 percent respondents said that the government of Pakistan must help the Afghan refugees. A follow up question in the same survey educated the respondents on the possible cost of supporting the Afghan refugees. This was an attempt to see if they would revise their views in that light. Only 3 percent became reluctant to support the Afghan refugees when they were told it could provoke Soviet hostility¹⁹

This public opinion survey was repeated in 1982, 1983 and 1984. There was a slight decline in public support for the Afghan refugees, but it remained overwhelming high. The survey in 1984 also showed the willingness to give

¹⁸ USCR interview with UNHCR representative Hasim Uktan, Islamabad, June 2001. See for details *Pakistan: Afghan Refugees Shunned and Scorned*. .5

¹⁹ Ijaz. S. Gillani (1994). *The Four R's of Afghanistan*, Pakistan Institute of Public Opinion, Islamabad. 9

private help to the refugees: only 13 percent disapproved that Pakistanis in their personal capacity should help the Afghan refugees. It is significant to note that this high level public support to the Afghans was maintained despite realizing that the refugees were an enormous burden, and the fear that they may be infiltrated by saboteurs. About two-thirds of the respondents believed that the refugees were an economic burden and about half feared the infiltration by saboteurs. The tranquil situation between the refugees and the local population seemed to rest on widespread public support on the refugee question, which was not naïve about the costs of supporting the refugees in terms of inviting Soviet hostility, economic cost and threat to the local law and order situation.²⁰

Over the period of time, the attitude of local population changed.²¹ Initially, the refugees had been greeted with open arms, as Muslim brothers and sisters. But as their numbers swelled and the burden of their care began to weigh heavily on Pakistan, there were calls by locals residents for their control, if not forced repatriation. They had become weary of their prolonged stay and wanted them to return but some were realistic enough to observe that they may never opt for repatriation as they had better living here than in their war torn country.

The mind-set of locals had begun to change with the policy of the government, which hardened its attitude towards Afghan refugees, a development that was summed up by Muhammed Haroon Shaukat, Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as follows, “if donors have donor fatigue... then we have asylum fatigue... If donors’ patience with the Afghan situation has run out, then so has ours.”²² Government officials justified their changing policy and attitude due to a number of factors²³:

1. Pakistan’s declining economy, which they say makes it impossible for the government to continue assisting refugees;
2. declining international financial support for the refugees;
3. the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in February 1989.

Refugees noticed this change in approach and they did complain about the fading hospitality. They felt that in a way they were being asked to return to their homeland as soon as possible. They no longer felt welcome and faced difficulties

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Pushtuns from South Waziristan and other tribal areas were among the first to complain about the privileges accorded to refugees, which they, claimed enabled the Afghans to live better than they did. Specifically, they criticized the wide array of services available in the camps as compared with far less access to education, housing services available to the border area people in Pakistan. Local people also believed that domestic expenditure on the refugees meant that assistance was at the expense of development programs for their impoverished areas. *Gallup Reports 1984-1988* (Islamabad: *Gallup Political Weather Report*, 1985, 1986, and 1989)

²² David Turton and Peter Maderson (2002), *Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan*, Issues Paper Series, Afghanistan Research Evaluation Unit. Kabul, December. .15

²³ USCR (2001), *Afghan Refugees in Pakistan at Risk*. July 31

which early refugees had not. Refugees faced police harassment as the government of NWFP started airing the idea that refugees need to return, because they considered Afghanistan was safe after the Taliban take-over. The government wanted their repatriation in safety and dignity, though conditions were still not conducive for return. However, as the Northern Alliance²⁴ opposed the Taliban government, the conflict continued and instability prevailed. Therefore, refugees found it difficult to repatriate despite the strong signals from the government of NWFP.

The demise of Taliban government, replaced by an internationally backed regime of Hamid Karzai, has altered the Pakistani perception that refugees are unduly prolonging their stay and they must return. There is, however, a consensus that repatriation should not be coerced.²⁵ The local populace does not perceive them a threat but a burden that has to be shed off sooner than later. The Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Najmuddin Khan, said 'although Pakistan has been hosting these Afghans for a long time but now the problems associated with their presence have aggravated more than ever before. The government never budged from its stance to cater to the needs of such a large and scattered number of refugees with the help of international community, but as the normalcy has been returning to Afghanistan, these refugees ought to be repatriated without any delay', he added.²⁶ The refugees, however, have displayed displeasure over the discrimination they face in the country in general and continue to look up to the local and international community for support and stay till stability returns to their country. Pakistani government has extended the stay of registered Afghans who possess the Proof of Registration (PoR) cards till 2012.²⁷ They were issued these cards in a registration drive during 2006- 2007. These cards were initially valid till December 2009, but due to the presence of an estimated 1.7 million registered refugees, the government decided to extend their stay till 2012.

Many of the refugees say that Pakistanis officials and locals alike have made it clear that they are unwelcome, and have increasingly made life here difficult for them. "Everything is being done by the government to harass the Afghan refugees," says Dost Mohammad, an acknowledged leader of Afghans who used to live at the Shamshato refugee camp in Peshawar, near the Pakistani border with Afghanistan. "We are poor people and the international community should not leave us in a lurch."²⁸ The welcoming door is being shut by the locals but

²⁴ An alliance of Afghan parties fighting against the Taliban.

²⁵ Saba Gul Khattak, Nazish Brohi, Saleem Shah, Kiran Habib & Shahbaz Bokhari. "Afghan Refugees: Dilemmas and Policy Solutions", *SDPI Research & News Bulletin*, Vol. 13. No 4 &5. July-October 2006. Islamabad.

²⁶ *Balochistan Times*, Pakistan. January 31, 2010

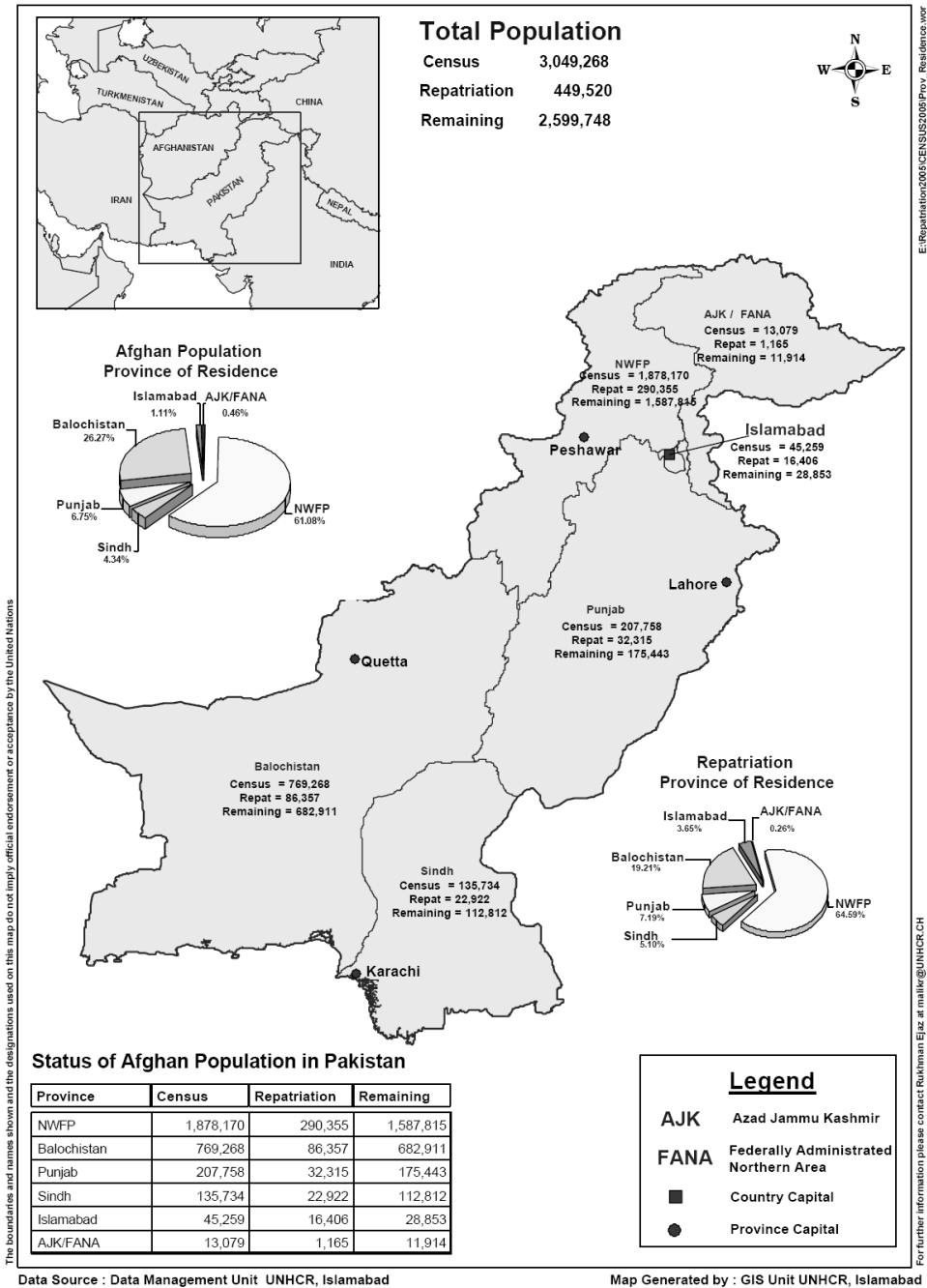
²⁷ *Pajhwok Afghan News*. Kabul, Afghanistan January 11, 2010

²⁸ Asfaque Yusufzai. "Pakistan: Afghans Find Their Welcome Running Out" *Global Geopolitics & Global Economy*. posted July 5, 2010. www.globalgeopolitics.net

they have not openly demonstrated against the protracted stay of Afghans and allow them to continue their businesses and movement.

Afghan Population in Pakistan - Census & Repatriation

March 01 - December 31, 2005



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

E:\Repatriation\2005\CENSUS\2005\Prov_Residence wor For further information please contact Ruhman Ejaz at malik@UNHCR.CH

4. Afghan Refugees: Economic Burden or Asset?

The economy of NWFP, where the largest concentration of Afghan refugees reside, is deficit with regards to food production and revenue resources. The Federal Government finances almost the entire developmental budget, because the revenue base of the province is small. In the beginning, the government in collaboration with international agencies and foreign governments provided relief assistance to the refugees. The support to refugees from the government of Pakistan and international agencies was not enough to sustain them. Some refugees moved with their movable property and invested in Pakistan. The refugees, therefore, in addition to self-employment entered into the full-fledged labor market.²⁹ Afghan refugees who brought capital resources or took to self-employment have positively contributed to the local economy. Peshawar has seen the influx of more money looking for return. One key position in this regard is the involvement of refugees in various trades owning shops in the main trade centers of Peshawar. There was visible expansion in the transportation services due to the arrival of refugee transport in form of buses and trucks. A private survey conducted in 1992 reported that at least 75% of the city's mini-buses as well as wagons belonged to the Afghans. According to the same report, they have a substantial stake in the freight haulage.³⁰

As refugees themselves stimulated a number of local markets, international aid contributed to the regional infrastructure. It led to development projects including forestation, irrigation, and road construction. This employed not only refugee labor but locals too that directly benefited the economy of Pakistan. There are two viewpoints prevailing in the NWFP, regarding the economic implications of refugees for the province. Some view that many refugees have not become a part of the provincial economy, it has received most of the support from external sources, independent from the provincial economy. They have not ostensibly drained provincial resources nor directly altered the welfare of the local inhabitants of Peshawar. They inhabit land provided to them independently, they receive food independently; in essence their shelter, their livelihood their money come directly to them leaving them essentially tangential to the provincial economy.³¹

Others have shown their apprehensions that despite the outside help, the refugees are a drain on the provincial economy. They have entered into the cities

²⁹ Ibid. p.17

³⁰ Mariam A. Khan, "Welcome to Mini-Afghanistan" *The News International*. October 2000

³¹ Ashraf, Asif & Arif Majid (1988). *Economic Impact of Afghan Refugees in NWFP*, Pakistan Academy for Rural Development. Peshawar, Pakistan. 4-5

and the hinterlands, got jobs and business to the resentment of the local inhabitants. In the villages, they have taken over natural pastures and pitched tents on them. The calm and equilibrium of the rural set up has been disturbed. Over grazing, cutting of foliage for fuel and pressure on water resources has polluted the rural environment. The refugees brought with them more than 2.5 million livestock, which had a detrimental effect on the environment because of grazing on the scarce pastures. Overgrazing extensively damaged the ecology of the green areas in the NWFP and Balochistan.³²

After food aid to most camp residents ended in 1995,³³ the number of refugees migrating to the cities increased (at about the same time, new refugees from Kabul—many of whom were urban professionals—entered Pakistan and settled in the cities). Employment became more scarce, local people's wages were driven down by the abundance of cheap labor, and rents went up as competition for housing rose. Refugees were willing to work for lower wages than their Pakistani counterparts – on an average, 25 percent less. And even while incoming refugees – created a larger demand for goods and services in the frontier region, increasing the supply of goods by opening up new businesses and smuggling goods in from Afghanistan, the increasing flow of goods led to inflation in some markets and to lower prices in others. Similarly, relief food when adequate or in excess found its way to the market, where it contributed to price deflation and thus subverted local food production.³⁴

Within local communities there were now signs of growing resentment to the prolonged presence of the refugees. Local Pakistani officials made intermittent statements about the need for repatriation of Afghan refugees. In September 1998, bureaucrats in North West Frontier Province reportedly met to devise a strategy for repatriating the refugees. In February 1999, the provincial Chief Minister announced plans to restrict all refugees to the camps in response to complaints that Afghans were taking away jobs from local people. Although the plans could not be implemented, the Chief Minister made repeated calls to the international community to assist the refugees to return to their homes in Afghanistan.³⁵

The government prohibits the refugees to buy property but refugees do not consider the law and get involved in such ventures due to weak governance. The local population interacts with them in such dealings and show them ways and

³² Ibid.

³³ USCR (2001). *Pakistan: Afghan Refugees Shunned and Scorned*, September. 20

³⁴ Frederic Grare (2003), “ The Geopolitics of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan in *Refugee Manipulation: War, Politics, and the Abuse of Human Suffering*, edited by Stephen John Stedman and Fred Tanner, The Brookings Institution, Washington D.C..64

³⁵ Amnesty International Report (1999), *Refugees from Afghanistan: The World's Largest Single Refugee Group*, November, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/regions/asia/document>

means to bypass the law. Many refugees have bought houses or built houses on bought lands. It is said that the revenue staff themselves have been involved in such activities. This has resulted in refugees owning property.³⁶ Sometimes, the refugees buy land by proxy, producing Pakistani identity cards or by providing forged back dated *nikah-namas* (marriage contracts) as another way of becoming a Pakistani citizen.³⁷

Afghans avail any business opportunity that comes their way. There have been two reasons for it; firstly the increased population of NWFP due to the refugee influx needed additional service, to meet the rising demands. To this both the local population and refugees have responded by investment whenever feasible. Secondly, the Afghans brought with them resources that they have invested. The concentration of investment in NWFP and Balochistan was mainly due to their limitation to move out freely to other parts of Pakistan. Ethnicity and proximity played an important role in it. This does not mean that the Afghans have not invested in businesses in other parts of the Pakistan. Islamabad and Karachi are other urban centers where refugees have set up businesses and rented places. These activities boosted the economy of the country, with refugees being viewed to have benefitted Pakistan economically. However, this perception is not held up by all the people, as all refugees are not rich and have no resources to invest in the host country.

Refugees are doing small businesses and charge competitive prices mainly to establish their business. Many local traders observed that refugee incomes are supplemented by the aid they get through outside agencies and the government of Pakistan. Since they do not have many social obligations like the local traders and do not pay the taxes, they can afford to work on smaller margins and still make profits. Thus the local traders are the main sufferers of this situation. They are facing tough competition from the refugees. In many markets in Peshawar, local traders have switched their trades or moved out.³⁸ Thus, the Afghan wealthier class generated tension with the local business class, because rents were pushed beyond the reach of the small commercial class. The wealthy Afghan refugees also found a way to get around the law that restricted their right to purchase property by obtaining National Identity Cards, domiciles and even passports through agents who charged handsome fees for such procurements.³⁹

Most of the refugees living in camps were the poor sections of population of Afghanistan and mostly unskilled agricultural workers. Since the farm sector in the NWFP did not have much absorption capacity and secondly these jobs were seasonal, majority of the refugee laborers subsequently entered into the urban job

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *The Muslim* August 27, 1983

³⁸ *Economic Impact of Afghan Refugees in NWFP*. 1988 p.10

³⁹ *US-Pakistan Relationship: Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan*, p. 202

market, which consisted of mostly construction and other day-to-day casual work including service industry. This large number of refugees entering into the labor market increased the supply of labor. This led to the lowering of labor wages. "If we ask for Rs.100 a day, they settle for Rs.70 or Rs.80. They have ruined over livelihood," said a laborer from Peshawar.⁴⁰

The price of real estate and rents went up after the influx of refugees. In the NWFP, particularly in Peshawar where all the head offices of the foreign missions and administration of Afghan refugees reside has had a real upsurge in prices of real estate and rents. Surveys of trade, commerce and rents of shops were carried out but with limited success as neither the refugees nor the local population revealed the correct rates. According to a report a house worth of Rs.5000/-per month in 1980 was worth Rs.50,000/ in 1985 with two years of advance rent. Many property dealers confirmed this.

For the refugees, the rent per capita was not high as multiple families would reside in one house. This was true for a large number of refugees residing around Peshawar. The local residents who moved into Peshawar for business or services faced tremendous difficulty in obtaining houses at affordable rents.⁴¹ The local owners of the house especially in University Town area where the majority of rich refugees and foreign missions were present moved out to less expensive areas renting out their own houses for handsome rents. The cantonment area did not witness this kind of situation. The refugees and foreign missions were discouraged to occupy houses in the cantonment for security reasons. The city area and centers for jobs and business faced a major housing problem. Peshawar fetched the same rents as Karachi and Islamabad, other two high rent cities though for different reasons.⁴² The situation in villages was, however, different. Villages did not have the tradition to let houses. In NWFP, a house was given to a tenant or any body else free of rent in return for certain free services to the landlord. Many refugees who were not residing in the camps and could not afford high rents in the cities took over residences in the villages where rents were comparatively low. The poor villagers benefited out of this as it added to their meager sources of income.

Environmental damage caused by refugees is mostly irreversible. The impact of these refugees on renewable natural resources is of particular concern as it can have a drastic long-term effect. Trees are cut down to provide support for shelter while branches are collected for firewood and charcoal. Foliage is cut to feed livestock. Ground vegetation is cleared to make way for farming; even tree roots are dug up in extreme conditions and used as firewood. Eventually the land becomes unfit for even most basic forms of agriculture. The resulting rapid and

⁴⁰ *The News International*. October 2000

⁴¹ *Economic Impact of Afghan Refugees in NWFP*. 17

⁴² *Ibid.*32

uncontrolled deforestation since the 1980s has left the area with only about 12% of its original forest cover. According to a UNHCR research report, since the influx of Afghan refugees started in the 1980s, Turmeric Forest of Gird-e-Jungle in the Chaghai district (Balochistan) has been completely depleted and there has been no rehabilitation in the area at all.⁴³

Pakistan is going through tough times currently. The on-going militancy and extremists acts by the Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has made the country's security fragile, natural disasters (flash floods) during July-August 2010 have led to massive displacement of its own people and brought the economy to a stand still. Internal displacement has compounded the position of Afghan refugees as some of them have been displaced due to military operations in the restive parts of NWFP as well as floods. The despair of refugees continue amidst official statements that presence of refugees population serve as safe havens for terrorists and extremists elements from Afghanistan, thereby adding to instability and insecurity. It is generally believed that some of these refugees indulge in illegal activities like drug peddling, arms smuggling and have also been found involved in incidents of terrorism in the country.⁴⁴ These activities have had a downward impact on the domestic economy. However, Afghan refugees cannot be exclusively held responsible for the financial woes of Pakistan.

5. Social Costs and Benefits of Hosting Afghans

The Afghans brought with them their own style of dressing and eating. Some of it was adopted by the locals e.g., Afghan style baggy trousers and long shirts became popular with the youth of the NWFP and Balochistan provinces. Similarly restaurants run by Afghan have considerably attracted consumers. "People in Peshawar always love to eat and now with all these eating places, we have more choice," said Rehman, a Pakistani.⁴⁵ A survey conducted by *The Frontier Post* revealed that the local restaurants lagged behind in competition with Afghan restaurants. The factors responsible for the growing popularity of Afghan food among the consumers include cheaper cost, quick service, simple food and informal environment projecting their culture. Afghan refugees have abundance of restaurants and cuisine in other parts of the country as well. Their decoration of cars for weddings has become particularly popular with the locals.

Intermarriages between the local Pushtuns and Afghans have become common. It is not only for the passport or for identity that the Afghans are entering the bond of marriage, it itself is another lucrative business. Those involved in it, earned large amounts of money, as an Afghan possessing a

⁴³ Hania Aslam. "The Impact of Afghan Refugees on the Natural Resources of Pakistan." <http://www.takingitglobal.org> retrieved December 12, 2002

⁴⁴ *Balochistan Times*, Pakistan. January 31, 2010

⁴⁵ *The News International*. October 8, 2000

Pakistani Identity Card, gave him social and economic security. Many Afghans admit that it is easier to get the Identity Card. Who would mind paying a few thousand rupees for security?⁴⁶

Their impact on Pushtun culture has been enormous. In NWFP and Balochistan the standard of Pushto music has improved, its journalism developed and its literature advanced. Dr. Fazal Rahim Marwat, Pakistan Study Centre, University of Peshawar, mentioned in an interview that 22 countries started broadcasting Pushto service. Pushto dailies like *Sahar* and *Wahdat* started with impressive circulation along with other Pushto newspapers, weeklies and monthly journals. Afghan singers have earned popularity amongst the locals and their folk music along with remixes of old and new Pushto songs are now a days highly admired by the youth of the two provinces.

Negative impact of Afghan refugees on Pakistani society has also been observed. A large number of refugees are involved in drug trafficking and arms smuggling and a small number in prostitution. The government did not take notice of the so-called Bara markets in Pakistani towns, where smuggled goods are openly available. In these markets now, along with local tribal people, refugees are involved too.

Many Afghan poppy growers shifted their production to Pakistan's tribal areas due to the war. The growers set up laboratories in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, and, as a consequence of the smuggling, heroin consumption increased dramatically in Pakistan itself. Before the 1980s, drug addiction was relatively unknown to most Pakistanis. By 1982, Pakistan reportedly had 1.3 million addicts: 100,000 on heroin. By 1986 the number of heroin addicts had exceeded 450,000, and in 1987 the official count rose to 657,842. Although Afghan refugees are not solely responsible for this situation, however, their arrival in Pakistan correlates with it.⁴⁷ It worsened the drug problem in Pakistan. While smuggling of drugs became a lucrative business for some refugees, it became a major menace to Pakistani youth. This massive drug trafficking has defamed Pakistan internationally because Pakistan was used as the main shipment point for heroin trafficking abroad.

Klashankov culture has been introduced in the Pakistani society due to the presence of unlimited weapons in the refugee camps, though legally the refugees are not allowed to keep weapons in camps. During the early period of jihad, the US Congressmen alleged that corrupt officials and mujahideen siphoned off 40 percent of the total arms aid to Afghan freedom fighters. "The weapons which came to Pakistan from abroad for Afghan jihad, one thirds of the total weapons

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *Refugee Manipulation: War, Politics, and the Abuse of Human Suffering*. .64

were taken by political figures and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), one thirds by Afghan commanders and the remaining went to mujahideen.”⁴⁸

Due to the possession of heavy weapons, many refugees became assassins and they regularly took part in local feuds on payment, using their own weapons. Not only were the arms and ammunition supplied by donor countries sold in the open market but also the once crude armament factories of Darra Adamkhel began producing sophisticated weapons. With the result that what was once an essential item for the Afridis, Mohmands, and Wazirs in the tribal areas, Klashankov became commonplace among the landlords, politicians, university students and private militias throughout Pakistan.⁴⁹

The rapid growth of population of both the locals and the refugees⁵⁰ is a contributing factor for the high crime rate. The rates of crime in different parts of the country have risen considerably and the law enforcing agencies have attributed it to the long presence of Afghan refugees. “90 percent of the accused arrested during the first 15 days of the year 1999 in various cases were Afghan refugees. After committing crimes, the criminals cross over to their country and stay there till the case subsides.”⁵¹

The influx of Pushtun speaking Afghan refugees in Balochistan disturbed the delicate ethnic balance in the province by strengthening the ranks of the Pushtuns, thereby reducing the Balochis to a minority in their own province. The refugees not only increased the ratio of Pushtun population by 10% to 15%, but also were instrumental in rapidly reducing Balochi predominance. The Baloch had long resented the domination of Pushtun tribes in their area. Quetta is heavily Pushtun, and with the influx of mostly Pushtun refugees, the province appeared likely to develop a Pushtun majority. Thus, in contrast with the NWFP, the refugees provoked the Baloch leaders, but their presence also neutralized Baloch nationalists’ dream of creating a Greater Balochistan.⁵² There were calls in Balochistan for the refugees to return to Afghanistan. Benazir Bhutto along with other members of the opposition also held the same view. These opponents of the government also claimed that the government was inflating reports of numbers of the refugees in order to increase aid received from abroad.⁵³

⁴⁸ Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema (1988), “Impact of Afghan war on Pakistan”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol. XI. January, 27-31

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ The ratio of refugees to local population in NWFP and Balochistan is one to six/seven, except in some high density area, where it is one to one. See Hasan Askar Rizvi. “Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Influx, Humanitarian Assistance and Implications” in *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.XXXVII No.1 1984

⁵¹ *Business Recorder*. January 17,1999

⁵² A. Z. Hilali (2002), “Costs and Benefits of Afghan War for Pakistan,” *Contemporary South Asia*, 11,(3) Routledge, UK pp.291-310

⁵³ *Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Will They Go Home?* p.8

Former Chief Minister of Balochistan, Sardar Akhtar Mengal held Afghan refugees responsible for increasing crime rate and introducing Klashankov culture and narcotics in Balochistan and argued that refugees have also created law and order problems in the province, otherwise the overall law and order in the province was better as compared to other parts of the country.⁵⁴

Conclusion

Refugees have been an opportunity as well as threat for Pakistan. Refugees have benefited the host in several ways and the political costs and risks posed by them have been exaggerated. However, the security, economic, political and social threats arising out of the protracted stay of Afghans is because of the flawed Afghan policy rather than the refugees. This does not mean that the presence of over 1.7 million refugees do not pose any threat at all. They have their economic and political fall out given the present situation of Pakistan, but that can be reduced provided the government devises an effective strategy in managing these refugees and making their return possible in future. Had the government not used them for strategic purposes, refugees would not have become a major threat. Had the locals and government officials not been involved in illegal activities such as providing fake identity cards, buying property, smuggling etc. refugees would not have contributed to increasing crimes and social ills in the society. As the stay of refugees started taking its toll, and the implications became stark, it compelled Pakistani policy makers to revise their refugee policy, and start stressing on the need for safe repatriation of Afghans. They realized that repatriation of Afghans was the only solution to freeing the country from the political and economic costs of hosting them.

Pakistan should evolve institutional mechanisms to manage the residual Afghan population in a manner that they benefit the hosts and reduce threats that have affected the country. Refugee businesses, accommodation outside camps and education need monitoring and vigilance on the part of authorities that will reduce the mounting resentment amongst refugees and locals alike. The business and educated Afghans should be allowed to engage in constructive activities that contribute positively and help both the refugees and locals. Those Afghans who are supporting the Taliban insurgency on both sides of the border are a security threat for both the countries. Therefore, the two governments—Pakistan and Afghanistan— should jointly take steps to curtail their movement and actions.

⁵⁴ *The News International*. October 26, 1997