Afghanistan After the Taliban

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By G. Faruq Achikzad

I. Introduction

The following essay is by G. Faruq Achikzad, former UN resident coordinator in United Arab Emirates, Cyprus, and North Korea. He now advises Children of War on humanitarian aid to children in Kabul and Peshawar and currently lives in San Ramon, California. With respect to the recent US strikes upon Afghanistan, Achikzad warns that if the Taliban are in fact removed from power, the US must not repeat its past mistake of abandoning a war-battered Afghanistan to outside regional powers. Furthermore, Achikzad argues that it is crucial for the UN Security Council to support the former King of Afghanistan, and focus their efforts on permitting Afghans to establish their own democratic government, free from all interference.

II. Essay By G. Faruq Achikzad

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While the US attempts to eliminate the symptoms of international terrorism across the globe, it is imperative to simultaneously identify and deal with terrorism's root causes. In Afghanistan, those causes are directly linked to the ruling Taliban movement.

Most people are aware that the Taliban grew out of the Afghans' struggle against the Soviet Union. However, unlike the various Mujahideen groups which arose from the Afghan people themselves to fight the Communist invaders, it is now abundantly clear that the Taliban were created, trained and supported by Pakistan. The Taliban began as an ethnically and culturally diverse group of young boys, educated in Pakistani Madrasas (elementary religious schools) and trained to fight a new form of guerrilla war. In the aftermath of the Soviet defeat, the different Mujahideen factions swiftly sank into a quagmire of civil war. The Taliban – acting under the direction of the Pakistani government – moved to fill the power vacuum created by this unrest. To their credit, the Taliban brought a long awaited peace to this devastated country, but at a great social and economic cost.

Usama Bin Laden, who fought shoulder-to-shoulder with the Afghans against the Soviet Union, found a safe haven in Taliban- dominated Afghanistan. Though not an Afghan, Bin Laden soon bound the Taliban leadership to him through his great wealth, military assistance and marriage. As a result, the Taliban are now the target of a massive military operation that will, hopefully, lead to their ouster.

To oppose the Taliban, who are not purely Afghans and who were unleashed on Afghanistan by Pakistan, some of the Mujahedeen factions regrouped and formed the Northern Alliance. This front, which has never controlled more than 10 percent of the country, has fought the Taliban for six years without much success. Ironically, the most important leader of that alliance, Ahmad Shah Massoud – the man who really led the battle against the both the Soviet Union and the Taliban – was assassinated by terrorists only 36 hours before the September 11 attacks on the US.

Now that the US and its allies are bombing the Taliban and Bin Laden's camps in Afghanistan, it is a must – both in my view and in the view of most Afghans – that they not let history repeat itself by leaving a war-battered Afghanistan in the hands of outside regional powers. Assuming the US and its allies succeed in driving the terrorists and their supporters from Afghanistan, I would like to make the following suggestions:

1) The United Nations must be made the focal point to deal with all questions about Afghanistan. That is, the Security Council must make it possible for the Afghans to establish their own democratic government, free from all interference–- either from its neighbors and any other country.

2) To that end, the secretary general should immediately support the former Afghan king in his efforts to begin building a truly democratic future for the country. The king has already outlined a specific proposal for convening the Loya Jirga, or Grand Assembly, the traditional mechanism for resolving such crucial matters in Afghanistan. It is the view of the majority of Afghans that the king, as an elder statement, is the only figure who enjoys the trust and respect needed to lead this effort. The Northern Alliance must also assist and support him in this endeavor.

3) Finally, the international community, led by the UN secretary general, must provide all of the resources necessary – including peacekeeping forces – to support this process, to form a transitional government and to begin the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

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