

# ISLAM IN THE AFGHAN CONFLICT: LAST QUARTER OF THE TWENTIETH- EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

Andrey MARTYNKIN

*Ph.D. (Hist.), Assistant Professor, Chair of History and  
International Relations,  
Department of History and Philology,  
Branch of the Lomonosov Moscow State University in Sevastopol*

Sergey KHOMENKO

*Fellow, Department of History and Philology,  
Branch of the Lomonosov Moscow State University  
in Sevastopol*

## ABSTRACT

**T**he authors analyze Islam as one of the most important, if not decisive, factors responsible for the country's future; they reveal the specifics of its functioning in Afghan society as the state religion, investigate in great detail the contradictions between individual groups and organizations involved in the conflict of the last quarter of the twentieth century, and examine their impact on the social and economic relations in the region. The sides in the conflict belong to different ethnic, confessional, and political groups. The continued disagreements between the official

Muslim clergy and government in Afghanistan are a truthful reflection of the degree to which Islam affects the state's life-supporting spheres and figure prominently in ethnic strife and tribal enmity, along with all kinds of external factors that keep the conflict alive.

The article looks at the main Islamist organizations that will figure prominently on Afghanistan's domestic scene for several decades to come.

The authors believe that in the current conditions, Islam has ceased to be a factor of social stability and unity in Afghanistan.

**KEYWORDS:** *Islam, Afghanistan, Afghan conflict, civil war, Islamist groups, the Taliban, Islamic opposition, the Muslim clergy, Shi'a, Sunni.*

### *Introduction*

The very complicated structure of the Afghan conflict suggests that it should be discussed in its totality. It has spread to all branches and spheres of state governance and social and economic life and acquired national, religious, political, and ethnic dimensions. We should bear in mind that today, when the new system of international relations is changing its shape, the future of the region and the rest of the world, for that matter, depends on the Afghan settlement.

It should be said that the Afghan conflict has been escalating over half a century now; the U.S.-led counterterrorist coalition and all sorts of international structures are actively involved in the settlement efforts. They fight local Islamist radical groups and stand opposed to al-Qa'eda and the Taliban, the terrorist networks of which threaten the world community.

Today, it is highly important to analyze the policy of the Muslim clergy and political elite, the two main vehicles of Islam-related state policy.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the government's secular policy added tension to relations with the Muslim clergy and fanned the internal conflict. The reforms changed the property rights of the clergy and limited its influence inside the country. As could be expected, the clergy was displeased, it insisted that the nation was losing its cultural and spiritual specifics and that due to this fact, among other things, ordinary Muslims were pushed toward anti-government Islamic organizations. The government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), in turn, acquired an excuse to start repressions against and persecutions of all groups of the Afghan clergy.

On the other hand, the government took the interests of the clergy into account, but lost the chance to turn the clergy into their allies for consolidating the state and society against the Islamic opposition.

## **The Tragedy of the Traditional Clergy and the Islamic Idea as a Mobilizing Force**

By the late twentieth century, the conflict between the clergy and the government had reached its height to make it clear that the situation, which laid bare the traditional ethnic and political contradictions, had acquired new dimensions.

Islam became the main factor behind fanning or suppressing the conflicts.

By 1978, there were about 300 thousand members of the Islamic clergy (about 2% of the total population), whose interests were invariably taken into account by both King Mohammed Zahir Shah and Mohammed Daoud Khan, who dethroned him. The land reform implemented in the wake of the April Revolution, which brought the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan to power, undermined the economic basis of the land owners and rich peasants and deprived the clergy of their traditional subsistence sources, making them one of the most persistent enemies of the PDPA in the countryside.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: R.R. Sikoev, *Taliby: Religiozno-politicheskiy portret*, Kraft+, Moscow, 2004, p. 49.

Resistance led to repressions organized by the Khalq faction of the PDPA, which branded the Islamists enemies of the revolution. Repressions spread far and wide, engulfing the radicals, as well as the highest Islamic moderate clergy of both the Sunni and Shi'a.

In January 1979, Hafizullah Amin ordered the mass execution of members of the influential religious Mojadidi clan; in May, 117 Islamists were also executed.<sup>2</sup>

In 1980, the government, seeking tighter control over the religious leaders and reconciliation with the Islamic clergy, convened a conference of ulema, the first meeting of this sort in the country's history<sup>3</sup> attended by over 600<sup>4</sup> delegates. The Ulema Council set up by the conference was guaranteed a certain amount (though never clearly outlined) of power.

The new leaders of Afghanistan expected this dialog to transform Islam into a link between the government and the clergy.

In fact, the Muslim clergy, disoriented by the absence of an official coordinated policy, joined all sorts of Islamic groups. Those members of the clergy who remained loyal to the official ideology became, by definition, enemies of the Islamic opposition.

This pushed the clergy out of the country's political system; repressions followed. Imams, sheikhs, and mullahs, including the dean of the cathedral mosque in Kabul, lost their lives; the Kabul Polytechnic,<sup>5</sup> considered a seat of Islamic ideology and a source from which it was being spread across the country, was attacked. In 1983,<sup>6</sup> huge numbers of the official Muslim clergy were killed, which pointed to preliminary planning.

The people in power were fully aware of the scope of influence the leaders of the Islamic opposition enjoyed among the ordinary people and religious figures. Over 1,300 members of the official Muslim clergy filled high posts in the leading organs of the anti-governmental forces and were at the same time judges and heads of Islamic committees in the country's government.<sup>7</sup>

The government could not improve the situation, while the books on Islamic canons, regulations, and prescriptions no longer fit the new political reality or the unfolding jihad.

The government's attempts to control the Islamic figures and coordinate their activities merely fanned the tension.<sup>8</sup>

The Main Administration for Islamic Affairs at the Council of Ministers of the DRA could not cope with its main tasks—containment of aggression of the Islamic opposition and its disarmament. Nothing was done to spread ideological propaganda among the ordinary people; the government was engrossed in foreign politics and its relations with Pakistan in particular.

As early as 1980, the resistance movement supported by the clergy became a jihad and spread to 90% of the country's territory. In 1981, the government controlled only 203 (70%) of 290 districts; 74 districts were controlled by warlords of the Islamic opposition.<sup>9</sup>

In March 1982, the radical Islamists joined forces under the aegis of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Afghanistan, later transformed into the Islamic Front of Afghanistan Mujahideen, better

<sup>2</sup> See: M.F. Slinkin, "Afghanistan: Trevozhnoe leto i osen 1979," *Kultura narodov Prichenomoria*, No. 4, 1998, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> See: G.P. Kashuba, *Afganskije vstrechi*, DOSAAF SSSR, Moscow, 1981, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> See: V.F. Izgarshev, *Po dolgu internatsionalistov (iz afganskogo dnevnika voennogo zhurnalista)*, Voenizdat, Moscow, 1981, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> See: L.I. Medvedko, A.V. Germanovich, *Imenem Allaha... Politizatsia islama i islamizatsia politiki*, Politizdat, Moscow, 1988, p. 179.

<sup>6</sup> See: R. Galiullin, *TsRU protiv Azii: taynye operatsii protiv Indii i Afganistana*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1988, p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> See: V.S. Khristoforov, "Musulmanskoie dukhovenstvo v Afganskoy armii," *Voенно-istoricheskij zhurnal*, No. 10, 2006, p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> See: *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>9</sup> See: A.A. Lyakhovskiy, *Tragedia i doblest Afgana (The Tragedy and Valor of the Veterans of Afghanistan)*, GPI "Iskonna", Moscow, 1995, p. 54.

known as the Peshawar Seven, the main force which resisted the Soviet 40th Army and the Kabul PDPA regime.

The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Afghanistan brought together the Islamic Party of Afghanistan headed by Yunus Khalis, the Islamic Party of Afghanistan of Hekmatyar, Islamic Society of Afghanistan headed by Rabbani, the Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan led by Sayyaf, the Islamic Revolutionary Movement led by Nasrullah Mansoor, the Islamic Revolutionary Movement led by Rafiulli al-Mousin, and the Afghanistan National Liberation Front under Mohammad Mir.<sup>10</sup>

The members of the newly formed Peshawar Seven sealed their alliance and demonstrated their loyalty to the Islamic traditions by taking an oath on the Koran in the presence of the highest Muslim clergy.

It should be said that the war of 1979-1989 created another political force that, throughout the conflict, kept Islam-related issues in the center of attention. We have in mind the Tehran Eight officially known as the Islamic Coalition Council of Afghanistan, a pro-Iranian structure that united several parties and fought for the rights of the Shi'a in Afghanistan who under the king had been repressed for their religious affiliation.

The Tehran Eight was set up to balance out the Sunni, support the pro-Iranian opposition, and establish its control over the country's domestic policy. It was a spiritual center of sorts of the Shi'a of Afghanistan, which at all times looked toward the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI).

Its final aim was a Shi'a state patterned on the IRI, something which the Peshawar Seven and, later, the Taliban could not accept.

The Afghan Shi'a (Hazara, Qizilbash, Pamiri, etc.), who hailed the results of the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979, concentrated on exporting it to their own country. The Iranian opposition parties, in turn, stepped up their pressure on the Sunni groups accused, among other things, of being on the payroll of the U.S. special services. This further widened the gap among the Afghan provinces.

The Shi'a Hezbollah and the Corps of Islamic Revolution Guardians in Afghanistan intensified the conflicts based on religious affiliations, between the military and political elites, on the one hand, and the Muslim clergy and local tribes, on the other.

This made the Islamic opposition an alternative to the ruling regime. The ordinary people were attracted by its political program, which spoke of fairness, equality, respect for property rights, mutual assistance, straightforwardness, and morality. As distinct from the secular opposition, which had practically no grass-roots support, the Islamists had all sections of Afghan society on their side, even if they relied on intimidation, murders, and well-planned punitive operations<sup>11</sup>; the official Muslim clergy was gradually losing its position.

## Internationalization of Jihad and Emergence of the Jihadist-Salafi Ideology

From the very beginning, the conflict between the PDRA and the Islamic opposition became increasingly international. The first Islamic volunteers, mainly from Arab countries, arrived as soon as a Soviet "limited military contingent" was moved into the country in December 1979.

<sup>10</sup> See: V.N. Spolnikov, *Afghanistan: islamskaia oppositsia. Istoki i tseli*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1990, p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> See: R. Braithwaite, *Afghantsy. The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-1989*, Oxford University Press, London, 2011, p. 299.

In 1982, the number of Islamic volunteers began to grow and in 1987-1988 achieved its peak of about two thousand. Tens or, probably, hundreds of thousands of volunteers remained in Afghanistan during the war (including those not directly involved in the fighting).

According to certain sources, by the mid-1990s, there were 5,000 Saudi Arabs among the Arabic "veterans of Afghanistan," 3,000 Yemeni, 2,800 Algerians, 2,000 Egyptians, 400 Tunisians, 370 Iraqis, 200 Libyans, and dozens of Jordanian Arabs.<sup>12</sup>

In the late 1970s, the leaders of the Islamic opposition established close ties with the governments and special services of the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, and West European countries, which extended material and financial support and, in turn, used the opposition to promote their interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia. This strengthened the foreign radical Islamist movements and organizations operating in Afghanistan that relied on Western, particularly American, special services and the Jihad-Salafi ideology, the cornerstone of al-Qa'eda (which appeared in Afghanistan at that time) and the Islamic State.

When the Soviet "limited contingent" entered Afghanistan, Abdallah Azzam, a well-known Islamic extremist and leader of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, set up the Maktab al-Khidamat, or Services Office in Peshawar, which "acted as a recruiting center and clearing house for Islamic charities worldwide."

The Office operated through its agents scattered across Afghanistan; it was a clearing house through which the mujahideen gained access to the huge Arab funds of the oil-rich Gulf countries in particular.

The Services Office established direct contacts with the Islamic centers in the United States and Western Europe, which extended moral, material, and financial support to the Afghan opposition.<sup>13</sup> "The MAK had offices in both Detroit and Brooklyn, and its recruiting effort was encouraged by Reagan Administration."<sup>14</sup> The CIA supervised all efforts to enlist and dispatch Arab and other mercenaries to Afghanistan for a "jihad" against the country's government and the Soviet military contingent.<sup>15</sup> According to certain sources, the CIA spent over \$6 billion on enlisting, arming, upkeep, and training of the Islamic fighters.<sup>16</sup>

The American special services supplied Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who commanded the units of Al-Jamaat al-Islamiya and Al-Jihad al-Islami, with weapons, ammunition, and military equipment totaling over \$1 billion.<sup>17</sup>

From the mid-1980s onward, Osama bin Laden, one of the pupils of Abdallah Azzam, was actively involved in running the Services Office. In Afghanistan, he became closely acquainted with Ahmad Hasan al-Halili, the amir of Al-Jamaat al-Islamiya until 1994, Mohammad Showqi Al-Islambouli, Abdel Akher Hammad, Refa'i Ahmed Taha, and Mustafa Hamzah (later prominent members of Islamic extremist movements), who were actively engaged in the conscription and training of Arab mujahideen.

Osama bin Laden and Ayman az-Zawahiri, future amir of Al-Jamaat al-Islamiya destined to replace him as head of al-Qa'eda, became close friends; they cooperated in Afghanistan and Pakistan and lived in the same camps.

<sup>12</sup> See: A.V. Kudriavtsev, "Phenomen 'Arabskikh afgantsev'," in: *Blizhniy Vostok i sovremennost. Collection of Articles No. 17*, ed. by M.R. Arunova, A.O. Filonik, Moscow, 2003, p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> See: R. Musoev, "Afghanistan i arabskie strany," in: *Afganistan: vojna i problemy mira*, Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, Institute of the Studies of Israel and the Middle East, Moscow, 1998, pp. 112-113.

<sup>14</sup> J. Barry, C. Dickey, S. Levine, "Making a Symbol of Terror," *Newsweek*, 1 March, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> See: V.N. Spolnikov, op. cit., pp. 15-19, 28, 46-63, 86-87.

<sup>16</sup> See: T. Wains, "The Role of the CIA in Afghan Jihad and the Shift of Some of the Leaders to Support of 'Terrorism' against the U.S.," *As-Shark al-ausat*, 30 November, 1998, p. 6 (in Arabic).

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

The pullout of Soviet troops radically changed the situation—as soon as the force that kept the Islamic opposition and its fighters in check disappeared, the Afghan conflict flared up, while the mujahideen gradually gained control over some of the regions.

Back in 1981, the Peshawar Seven started moving toward an Islamic state as its main aim; this organization included such influential structures as the Islamic Society of Afghanistan (1976) headed by Professor of Kabul University Burhanuddin Rabbani and the Islamic Party of Afghanistan (1976) of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; both grew out of the Muslim Youth society that appeared in Afghanistan in the 1960s under the impact of the Muslim Brotherhood and its ideas.

Active fighting between the Islamists and the government troops in 1990-1992 detracted official power headed by Mohammad Najibullah from the social and economic problems, to say nothing of Islam.

In 1990, the PDPA reconsidered its theoretical provisions, adopted a new manifesto and changed its name to Watan (Motherland)<sup>18</sup>; it remained in power until 1992. The Soviet Union's disintegration forced the Watan leaders to move away from the communist ideology and agree to a compromise with the Islamic armed opposition, which finally destroyed the centralized state government.

The central government that existed until 1992 (when the party finally fell apart)<sup>19</sup> recognized the local and regional mujahideen-controlled power structures.

Moreover, the central government went as far as recognizing the councils of mujahideen as power structures,<sup>20</sup> which made its cooperation with the Muslim clergy, who took its command from the Islamists, impossible. Later the ruling party fell apart because of disagreements among its leaders over its future.

In April 1992, Najibullah and his Cabinet resigned, which allowed the Peshawar Seven to declare the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Several months later, in June, the Shura (the Supreme Council) of 1,335 members elected Burhanuddin Rabbani as president of the country.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to expectations, no political stability was established. The victors, in turn, plunged into a power struggle that divided the formerly unified state into zones of influence controlled by warlords. The former allies could no longer rely on Islam as a mobilizing force; it was replaced with national slogans as the main factor of struggle.<sup>22</sup>

General Dustum relied on the Afghan Uzbeks, while the Rabbani party put its trust in the Tajiks.<sup>23</sup> As could be expected, this revived armed clashes between mujahideen groups, local power structures indulged in arbitrary rule, banditry, and corruption, the national market fell apart, while personal safety disappeared; in short, the country was plunged into lawlessness.<sup>24</sup>

Warlords Ahmad Shah Masood, Abdul Ali Mazari, Mansur Naderi, and Abdul Rashid Dustum manipulated the ethnic factor to consolidate their power in the provinces and put pressure on the central government. The leaders of the Northern Alliance tried to set the Tajiks and Uzbeks against the Pashtuns, and the Ismaili and Hazarajat Shi'a against the Sunni.

<sup>18</sup> See: A.D. Davydov, *Afganistan: voyny moglo ne byt. Krestianstvo i reformy*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1993, p. 138.

<sup>19</sup> See: A.Sh. Gani, *Antimonarkhicheskiy perevorot v Afganistane i politika regima Dauda*, Moscow, 1994, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> See: V.G. Korgun, *Istoria Afgansitana. XX vek*, Kraft+, Moscow, 2004, p. 438.

<sup>21</sup> See: A.A. Kniazev, *Istoria afganskoy voyny 1990-kh gg. i prevrashchenie Afganistana v istochnik ugroz dlia Tsentralnoy Azii*, KRSU Publishers, Bishkek, 2002, p. 54.

<sup>22</sup> See: V.G. Korgun, "Islam i natsionalny vopros v Afganistane," in: *Islam na sovremennom Vostoke: Region stran Blizhnego i Srednego Vostoka, Yuzhnoy i Tsentralnoy Azii*, Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, Institute of Studies of Israel and the Middle East, Kraft+, Moscow, 2004, p. 108.

<sup>23</sup> See: S.M. Akimbekov, "Afganskiy uzel i problemy bezopasnosti Tsentralnoy Azii," available at [<http://www.continent.kz/library/KN-2/2soderzhanie.html>], 29 October, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> V.G. Korgun, "Taliby i Tsentralnaia Azia. Na avantsene—terrorizm," in: *Blizhniy Vostok i sovremennost. Collection of Articles No. 11*, ed. by A.O. Filonik, Moscow, 2001, p. 118.

This transformed Islam into an instrument of destruction the warlords did not hesitate to use to gain control over all kinds of administrative units (helis, districts, and provinces); they referred to Islam to justify the crimes committed to achieve personal aims, which, of course, were different for different commanders.

Tired of the turbulence, the local communities wanted stability under a strong central government. This explains why the Taliban, which in 1994 penetrated from Pakistan into Afghanistan, campaigned for a return to canonical Sunni Islam.

By September 1996, the Taliban had gained control over the larger part of the country and its capital Kabul. As the Taliban gained strength, other similar organizations sought stronger positions in the neighboring territories of Pakistan. "A Pakistani Islamist group called the Harakat ul-Mujahedin (HUM) gained more influence" and, accused of "the 7 August, 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, was placed on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations in October 1997."<sup>25</sup>

The Islamist group called Lashkar-e-Taiba set up in Pakistan was actively cooperating with the Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup> "According to the State Department's terrorism report, the leader of the Islamist group called Lashkar-e-Taiba has declared a 'jihad' against the United States."

By the late 1990s, the Afghan conflict spread to Pakistan, India, Central Asia, and other countries. "In late August 1999, Uzbek Islamist rebels seized several villages in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, taking several foreigners hostage in the process. On 12 October, 1999, Pakistan's army under General Pervez Musharraf deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a bloodless coup... on 16 February, 1999, the relatively stable government of Uzbekistan was rocked by six simultaneous explosions at several government buildings."<sup>27</sup>

## Contradictory Role of the "Afghan" Taliban

Afghanistan's international partners could not ignore what the Islamists were doing in the country. The United States, which entered into a political dialog with the Taliban in 1994, looked at it as a force able to end the civil war in Afghanistan. Its program returned the tribes to the pre-reform time, a period of monarchy when Amanullah Khan had not yet carried out modernization and introduced the novelties that amazed the U.S.S.R. during the emir's official visit in 1928.<sup>28</sup>

The Taliban, set up under ISI supervision, came into the limelight of Afghan politics on 29 October, 1994.<sup>29</sup> In September 1998, former Minister of the Interior of Pakistan Naseerullah Babar admitted that in 1994 he had been personally involved in setting up and training the military units of the Afghan Taliban; he said that during the Afghan war the ISI had organized a structure that gathered orphaned Pashtun boys mainly in the south of Afghanistan to place them in closed religious schools

<sup>25</sup> K. Katzman, "Afghanistan: Connections to Islamic Movements in Central and South Asia and Southern Russia," *Congressional Research Service Report RS20411*, 7 December, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> See: S.V. Khomenko, "Sotsialno-politicheskie vzgliady Amanully-khana vo vremia vizita v SSSR v diplomaticheskikh zapiskakh A.M. Kollontay," in: *Slinkinskie chtenia: materialy II Mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii pamyati professora M.F. Slinkina, 14 fevralia 2014 goda, Simferopol, Tom II. Nauchnoe internet-izdanie v 2-kh tomakh*, Simferopol, 2014, pp. 50-51.

<sup>29</sup> See: R. Farkhadi, "Vliianie islama na osvoboditelnuu voynu v Afghanistane," *Tsentrlnaia Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 1 (7), 2000, available at [<http://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-07-2000/16.farkhadi.shtml>], 29 October, 2014.

set up for this purpose by ISI and Islamic (mainly Deobandi) organizations where the boys were taught the fundamentals of Islam and received military training.<sup>30</sup> The graduates formed the backbone of the Taliban movement.

In 1992, when the Najibullah regime disintegrated, the civil war resumed; this kept a large part of the nearly 3.5 million refugees outside the country, from whom the ISI selected people able to set up power structures.<sup>31</sup>

The ISI paid particular attention to refugees without firm social roots and political opinions; living outside the traditions of their nation they could be shaped into vehicles of new fundamental Islamic values. “The Taliban ... claimed to be clearing the way for a true Islamic administration and, on that basis, demanded great sacrifices from their recruits, who received no pay, only weapons and food.”<sup>32</sup>

The Taliban, which relied on a lifestyle based on Islam and the use of force, unified the country, the population of which was at all times highly religious. Islamization re-united the nation, “No Muslim country can be conquered or kept united without Islam and its slogans.”<sup>33</sup>

Until the late 1990s, the U.S. lavishly funded the Afghan mujahideen through Pakistan; the United States extended humanitarian aid—this meant that America was on their side.

Washington retreated when the Taliban refused to extradite Osama bin Laden to the United States where he was accused of being involved “in the 7 August, 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.”

In the spring of 1996, he moved back from Sudan to Afghanistan under the pressure of America’s and Saudi Arabia’s insistent demands for his extradition. This intensified his anti-American feelings to the extent that on 23 August, 1996, he issued his first declaration of war against the United States, the Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries.

In February 1998, in Peshawar, bin Laden finally united all the Islamic extremists into a single structure called The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Islamic Lands (al-Jabha al-alamia li Tahrir al-amakin al-islamiya)<sup>34</sup> and issued a fatwa signed by the leaders of other organizations and movements united into the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders, which provided religious authorization for the indiscriminate killing of Americans and Jews, military and civilian, everywhere.

On 7 August, 1998, the blasts in the American embassy in Nairobi killed 213, including 12 American citizens, and wounded over 4,500, and on the same day in the American embassy in Dar-es Salaam 11 were left dead and over 85 wounded<sup>35</sup>; 9/11 was the finishing touch.

The Afghan conflict began gathering international dimensions; the country became a seat of extreme radical feelings because the modernizers of the traditional Muslim society in Afghanistan were not alien to violence and the use of force.

Under the PDPA, “the ummah was adjusting itself to this social organization while preserving its natural rigid organization based on the traditions of Islam.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See: A.A. Kniazev, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> See: I. Zhmuyda, “Afganskije bezhentsy v Pakistane,” in: *Blizhniy Vostok i sovremennost. Collection of Articles No. 17*, p. 265.

<sup>32</sup> P. Symonds, “The Taliban, the U.S. and the Resources of Central Asia,” available at [<http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2001/10/tal1-o24.html>].

<sup>33</sup> Yu.P. Laletin, “Teokratia talibov i afganskaia gosudarstvennost,” in: *Islam na sovremenom Vostoke: Region stran Blizhnego i Srednego Vostoka, Yuzhnoy i Tsentralnoy Azii*, p. 131.

<sup>34</sup> See: *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 11 April, 1990, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> See: *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 24 May, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> A.A. Kniazev, op. cit., p. 8.



The forces involved in the Afghan conflict could not come to an agreement because in the late twentieth century Islam, as a state religion, was used as an instrument of destruction.

Early in the twenty-first century, the U.S. deposed the regime, but found itself in the midst of an inner conflict that inspired other radical organizations; this changed the format of the civil war in Afghanistan—extremist groups and the Taliban excluded the “hit and run” tactics.<sup>37</sup>

At the early stage of the counterterrorist operation, the people increased their loyalty to the Taliban; the tribes became increasingly displeased with the economic instability and the “wrong” policies of international community. The Taliban supporters moved away from ideological and religious to economic reasons. To escape poverty and find some semblance of employment, they joined its ranks in the hope of finding a “job” and a decent salary of up to \$600.<sup>38</sup>

By that time, the struggle for the purity of Islam had lost much of its importance; first, the Taliban replenished its ranks from the territory of Pakistan and, second, the main aim, namely, the Islamic caliphate lost much of its rationale because it proved much easier to encourage more profitable corruption.<sup>39</sup>

The international community, which by that time had invigorated its struggle against global terrorism, used two methods to liquidate Islamist groups, including the Taliban.

The NATO-led counterterrorist coalition responded with Operation Invincible Freedom to 9/11; the first methods proved not very effective—military intervention could not radically change the country’s social and economic order<sup>40</sup> rooted in its distant past.

Western support for the administration of Afghanistan, which implemented its real power, was selected as the second method based on the plan elaborated by a team of donor-countries that funded its economy from the late twentieth century until today and, in this way, supported its official government. The plan was supported by about 45 states, while the total sum of grants ranged from \$10 thousand to hundreds of millions.<sup>41</sup>

“According to the preliminary needs assessment presented in January 2002 Afghanistan would need \$15 billion over the next 10 years.”<sup>42</sup> There is a clear understanding, however, that financial aid would not put an end to political fragmentation and settle ethnic and religious contradictions inside the country.

The international partners identified three seats of tension that have been smoldering since the beginning of the civil war in Afghanistan, “The conflicts between warlord-dominated areas and the central government, between the Shi’a and Sunni communities, and between Shi’a and Hazara political components of the Northern Alliance.”<sup>43</sup>

Reconstruction was too slow, despite numerous diplomatic contacts, financial aid, and clear religious policy. In 2004, Afghanistan was described as a “failed state.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See: V.G. Korgun, “Islamskiy ekstremizm v Afganistane,” in: *Problemy gosudarstvennogo i sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Afganistana. Doklady possiisko-kanadskoy konferentsii*, ISKRAN, Moscow, 2008, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> See: A. Loyd, “Corruption, Bribes and Trafficking: A Cancer that is Engulfing Afghanistan,” *The Times*, 11 November, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> See: M.R. Arunova, “Operatsia ‘Nesokrushimaia svoboda’. Zadachi, problemy, perspektivy,” in: *Sovremenny Afganistan i sopredelnye strany*, Moscow, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> See: R. Margesson, J. Bockman, “Reconstruction Assistance in Afghanistan: Goals, Priorities, and Issues for Congress,” *Congressional Research Service Report RL31759*, 26 February, 2003, pp. 35-36.

<sup>42</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> J. Montgomery, D. Rondinelli, *Beyond Reconstruction in Afghanistan. Lessons from Development Experience*, Palgrave Macmillan Press, New York, 2004, p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

## *Conclusion*

Early in the twenty-first century, the political actors did not recognize the importance of the Islamic factor and the role of the traditional Muslim clergy in Afghanistan, dominated by radical religious groups. The country became a vast platform of international terrorism that could be expanded to the nearest regions. The radical Islamist groups based in other countries would like to see Afghanistan either completely disintegrated or divided into spheres of influence.

From the point of view of conflict settlement, this can be accepted as a compromise, yet Afghan territory might become a space of uncontrolled activities of extremist organizations. This has already happened in Waziristan, one of the provinces of Pakistan, where the Taliban, which had been pushed away from Afghanistan, set up its unrecognized state.

In the early twenty-first century, Afghanistan, under mounting foreign (including Islamist) pressure, abandoned the formula of the mid-18th century when the first Afghan state (the Durrani Empire) appeared—Islam is a consolidating force that can keep Afghan society united despite ethnic disagreements.

The events of the turn of the twenty-first century undermined the country's social and political structure; the regional leaders are doing nothing to promote the interests of their tribes in the center, while the Muslim clergy in the regions is either dead or intimidated by Islamist radicals.

The official government represented by the president of Afghanistan needs a new plan of reconstruction of national unity and efficient international economic aid.