

# TERRORISM IN AFGHANISTAN AND INSTABILITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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## *Introduction*

Throughout human history, there have been many threats to the security of nations. These threats have brought about large-scale losses of life, the destruction of property, widespread illness and injury, the displacement of large numbers of people, and devastating economic loss. Recent technological advances and ongoing international political unrest are components of the increased risk to security.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: R. Borum, "Psychology of Terrorism," USF (University of South Florida), Tampa, 2004, p. 145.

Terrorism, as one of these threats to human security, literally means "the use of force or violence against persons or property in violation of the criminal laws of the United Nations for purposes of intimidation, coercion, or ransom."

Terrorists often use threats to:

- Create fear among the public;
- Try to convince citizens that their government is powerless to prevent terrorism;

—And get immediate publicity for their causes.<sup>2</sup>

An analysis of more than 100 diplomatic or scholarly definitions on terrorism shows that most of them have one element in common: “The use of violence for achieving the political, ideological, and/or social objectives.”<sup>3</sup>

The independence of Central Asia’s five Muslim republics in 1991 fundamentally altered the geopolitical scene in the center of the Eurasian continent. Two security threats were defined: the risk of “loose nukes” and the threat of imported radical Islam.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> See: R. Perl, *Terrorism, the Future and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division, Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, 2003, p. 15.

Since the Taliban movement’s emergence in 1994 and its subsequent conquest of 90% of Afghanistan’s territory, Afghanistan has been perceived as the prime security threat to southern Central Asia. The illegal narcotics trade centered in Afghanistan has accentuated this perception. Instability and unrest in Afghanistan has provided anti-regime forces from Central Asian states with a sanctuary. The most blatant is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) that reportedly has over a thousand fighters only miles away from the borders of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

This has rekindled the domino theory of radical Islam, upsetting regional stability and endangering secular regimes. However, it is very doubtful that the Taliban ever aimed to spread radical Islam, its purpose was more likely to consolidate Afghanistan and its political orientation.

## Afghanistan before the Rise of Islamic Radicalism

The history of Afghanistan has been decisively influenced by its geopolitical position and status, especially its location as the site of a struggle between the Russian empire (later the U.S.S.R.) and Britain (and the West). Afghanistan’s formation began in 1747 when Nader Shah, the ruler of Iran, of which Afghanistan was a province at that time, was assassinated. One of his military commanders by the name of Ahmad Khan took advantage of the opportunity, gathered the Pashtun tribes around him, and established an independent principality with its capital in Kandahar, where he ruled until 1773. Ahmad Khan laid the foundation for the dynasty of Afghanistan’s rulers. He took the title Ahmad Shah Dur-Durrani, or Durrani for short, a name which was associated with the tribal coalition that he headed and became the name of the dynasty that ruled Afghanistan until 1973.<sup>4</sup>

Consolidation of the Pashtun ethnic minority and growing Russian involvement in Afghanistan gave rise to British concern over the possible impact of developments in Afghanistan on the stability of British rule, particularly in areas of India populated by the Pashtun. In 1838, the British invaded Afghanistan and the first Anglo-Afghan war began.

Another significant milestone in Afghan history occurred in 1919 when Amanullah Khan ascended the throne; he felt the time was ripe to achieve full independence for his country. On 13 April, 1919, he declared the independence of Afghanistan. Thus began the third Anglo-Afghan war, a time in which the Afghans suffered many failures on the battle field, but Britain, mainly for political reasons, was forced to officially recognize the independence of Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See: Sh. Shay, *The Endless Jihad*, International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, Herzliya, Israel, 2002, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> See: M.S. Farhang, “Afghanistan in the Last Five Centuries,” *Ismaeliyan press* (Qom), 1992, pp. 30-32.

The U.S.S.R. was the first power to recognize the independence of Afghanistan and institute diplomatic relations. The friendly relations between the U.S.S.R. and Amanullah Khan's regime resulted in the first Soviet attempt at military intervention in Afghanistan in 1929, when Stalin sent a Soviet military force in an attempt to save Amanullah Khan's regime.

The failure of Amanullah Khan's reforms provided an important lesson learned and implemented by the rulers of Afghanistan in the years that followed, and the central government made every effort to avoid friction with the traditional establishment and peripheral tribal system. Consequently, the influence and control of the central government over the periphery was minimized, and the hegemony of the tribal system and local leadership was preserved through extensive autonomy in these regions. The separation between the central government and the periphery prevented development of an infrastructure of services and a modern economic system, and most of Afghan society became rooted in place as a patriarchal tribal system based on traditional sources of income like agriculture, sheep raising, carpet weaving, etc.<sup>6</sup>

Bellow is a list of other significant landmarks in Afghanistan's history:

- the rise and fall of the republic regime in Afghanistan and subsequent emergence of a pro-Soviet regime there;
- the civil war and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan;
- the arrival of the Jihadi forces in Afghanistan, failure of the Soviet forces in confrontation with them, and their urgent departure from the country;
- the Mujahidin victory and subsequent eruption of the next round of the Afghan civil war.

## **Influential Factors Leading to the Formation of Terrorism in Afghanistan**

The Afghan Mujahidin movements were characterized by the heterogeneity of their components resulting from ethnic, religious (Sunni/Shi'ite), political, and ideological differences and by the absence of an authoritative and purposeful leadership. The only common denominator among the Islamic fundamentalist groups and organizations was the desire to banish the Marxist regime that ruled in Kabul and the Soviet invading forces. However, this common aim was not sufficient to prevent rivalries and violent power struggles between the various factions, which sometimes exposed them to serious blows from their common enemy. Most of the Mujahidin movements centered around traditional religious leadership based on ethnic regional considerations, although some of the movements were heterogeneous and included supporters and activists from various ethnic groups.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, when the Mujahidin managed to take control of the country, they could not act as an orderly alternative to the regime. There was no charismatic leader among the Afghan Mujahidin able to unify the ranks. Their military and political leaders emerged from the various movements, but no effective umbrella framework acceptable to all the movements developed.

The lack of political stability and continued conflict with the opposition prevented the regime and the population from working toward rehabilitation of the infrastructure and economy that had been

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<sup>6</sup> See: M. Heller, "The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," *C.C.S. Memorandum*, No. 2, 1982, pp. 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> See: Sh. Shay, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

destroyed by years of war. The struggle for control of Afghanistan after the fall of the Communist regime was no longer an ideological conflict or a battle for national liberation; it became a struggle for power and control between the leaders of the movements, nourished and motivated by ethnic and regional interests as well. The endless clashes resulted in a state of anarchy in Afghanistan, with the central government controlling Kabul while, elsewhere in the country, commanders of military militias and heads of Mujahidin movements did as they pleased in the areas they held. So gradually fertile ground was created for cultivating terrorism and other organized crime in Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup>

Following the conquest of Kabul by the Mujahidin and the beginning of their rule, different international coalitions appeared in relation to the Mujahidin government, which opposed the former general point of view regarding the Mujahidin. A kind of indifference and disregard toward the transitional government under president Rabbani was perceived among the external supporters of the Mujahidin, especially in the West. As a first measure, Thompson, the American ambassador in Afghanistan, was recalled and sent to another mission.<sup>9</sup>

This issue can be clearly seen in the words of Rabbani himself during his interview with the newspaper *Payame Mujahid*. During his interview, Rabbani argues that the aid provided by different countries during the jihad was not based on a consistent strategy. Each one was following its own aim; for instance, the U.S. considered two issues at that time: the Cold War with the U.S.S.R., which was going on regardless of its high cost, on the one hand, and the negative image of the Vietnamese war that remained in the Americans' mind, on the other.<sup>10</sup> The absence of Western countries in Afghanistan created fertile ground for cultivating terrorism and other organized crimes.

## An Overview of the Taliban Movement's Emergence in Afghanistan

The Taliban movement grew out of the Islamic schools in Pakistan. The term "Talib" means pupil or student of Islam in both Arabic and Farsi. Unlike most of the Afghan Mujahidin movements which emerged in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the context of the struggle (jihad) against the Communist regime in Kabul and its Soviet allies, the Taliban was established in the early 1990s after the Mujahidin movements already ruled Afghanistan.

The movement developed from a sense of frustration with the civil war among the Mujahidin factions, which continued after expulsion of the Communist regime, a frustration felt by significant portions of the Afghan population in both Afghanistan and the refugee camps in Pakistan. Rabbani's government did not succeed in imposing its rule on most of Afghanistan. It remained ruptured, divided, and under the control of various Mujahidin factions with local militia leaders doing as they pleased in the regions under their control.<sup>11</sup>

The Taliban believed that Rabbani's government and most of the rival Mujahidin movements in Afghanistan did not practice the laws of Islam (in the spirit of Shari'ah) properly and were far from the Islamic state they had pledged to establish during the struggle against the Communists. This movement therefore emerged as a social and religious one that hoped to change the anarchic face of Af-

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 65-67.

<sup>9</sup> See: *The Middle East*, February 1990.

<sup>10</sup> See: "An Interview with Borhaneddin Rabbani," *Newspaper of Payame Mujahid* (Kabul), 8 March, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> See: *Dow Jones News*, 21 September, 1997.

ghanistan, turning it into a true Islamic state according to the interpretation and understanding of its founders.<sup>12</sup>

The Taliban led an ascetic lifestyle centered on religious studies that began each day with morning prayers at dawn and ended in the evening, with only short breaks for food and prayer during the day. The Taliban adopted the strict Hanafi interpretation as a mandatory philosophy and, like the Deobandis, embarked on a struggle to impose what they saw as “true Islam” in Afghanistan.

The Taliban’s rivals claim that the Taliban movement did not emerge spontaneously and naturally as an Islamic reform movement, but was in fact established by the Pakistani intelligence services to further Pakistan interests on the Afghan arena.

The Taliban movement initially established religious groups on the political and military fronts and led them to conquer ninety percent of the territory of the country and control these areas.

Under the Taliban, Islamic law was enforced by deterrents, punishment, and terror, which elicited harsh criticism from international human rights organizations. The Taliban strictly enforced Islamic law in all areas under their control but received international attention mainly after they took over Kabul and established a strict Islamic lifestyle in a city that until then had enjoyed more exposure to Western lifestyles and had a higher percentage of foreign nationals than other regions. As soon as the city was conquered, the Taliban announced that women were forbidden to work outside the home and girls were not permitted to attend school. The prohibition on women working was an extremely harsh blow to the income of many families in Kabul, especially those of the 25,000 war widows who were the sole breadwinners in their families.<sup>13</sup>

## Al-Qa‘eda’s Emergence and its Role in Afghanistan’s Developments

One of the prominent products of the jihad in Afghanistan was Osama bin Laden, who was one of the fifty-three children of Muhammed Awad bin Laden, a wealthy Saudi business man of Yemenite extraction. Bin Laden Senior is the owner of one of the largest construction companies in the Middle East.<sup>14</sup>

After the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan and the Afghan Mujahidin’s call to their brothers in the Muslim world to launch a jihad, Osama bin Laden also left Saudi Arabia and, together with groups of supporters and heavy engineering equipment, came to Pakistan and joined in the Afghan Mujahidin struggle. Initially Bin Laden dealt with establishing an apparatus for recruiting Arab volunteers for the jihad against Kuffar.

At the end of the 1980s, Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia and was received as a hero in radical Islamic circles. Very soon he began inciting against the Saudi regime, which he perceived as corrupt and heretical. Bin Laden’s relations with the Saudi government reached a crisis point when he openly criticized the government agreement to deploy U.S. and coalition forces in its territory during the Gulf War. Against this background, Bin Laden fled from Saudi Arabia to Sudan, together with a group of “Afghan Alumni,” and continued to manage his affairs and his subversive activities from there. In 1994, the Saudi government revoked his citizenship and put a price on his head.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See: *Dow Jones News*, 21 September, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> See: Ch. Pahlavan, “Afghanistan: Era of the Mujahidin and the Taliban,” *Qatreh Press* (Tehran), Vol. 1, 1998, p. 212.

<sup>14</sup> See: M. Pohly, Kh. Dowran, *Who is Bin Laden?*, Transl. by M. Mirmoezzi, *Rozaneh Press* (Tehran), 2001, p. 44.

<sup>15</sup> See: K. Khosravi, “Osama Ibn Mohammed Bin Laden,” *Simindoxt Press* (Tehran), 1996, pp. 90-95.

He established an economic empire in the Sudan, which included leatherwork factories, construction companies, a bank, agricultural farms, and import-export companies. This economic system provided employment for his “Afghan Alumni” friends and sources of income to fund his subversive activities, including the establishment and management of training camps for Islamic terrorists from the world over.<sup>16</sup>

Upon returning to Afghanistan, which was still under the Mujahidin regime headed by Rabbani and Masud in Kabul, Bin Laden settled in the city of Jalalabad, which was held by the Taliban at the time. Only months after his return, the Taliban conquered Kabul and most of Afghanistan and Bin Laden enjoyed freedom of movement throughout the country. In February 1997, the Taliban rejected an American proposal offering international recognition of their regime in exchange for the extradition of Bin Laden. In March 1997, Bin Laden survived another assassination attempt which involved the explosion of two bombs that left fifty killed and one hundred and fifty wounded. Bin Laden himself was not hurt.

Following the assassination attempt, Bin Laden moved to the city of Kandahar—the Taliban movement’s hub of power. The Taliban’s official claim was that Bin Laden had moved to Kandahar so that they could keep an eye on his movements and activities and prevent him from being involved in any terrorist activities. Nonetheless, Bin Laden continued to operate training camps in Afghanistan, where hundreds of Islamic terror activists were trained and then sent to set up terror cells of the al-Qa’eda organization around the world.<sup>17</sup>

Subsequently, in a series of aggressive interviews for *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the BBC, Bin Laden called on his Muslim brothers to renew their aggression against the foes of Islam. He presented the attainment of non-conventional weapons as a religious obligation, contending that every Muslim who prevents it is sinning against his faith.<sup>18</sup>

In an attempt to convince the Taliban to extradite Bin Laden for arrest, the U.S. dispatched an ambassador to Afghanistan. Despite promises from senior Taliban officials to restrain him, the Taliban did not respond to the demand to extradite Bin Laden to the U.S. or prevent him from threatening to carry out acts of terror against it.

Following the deadly terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, the U.S. demanded the immediate extradition of Bin Laden, accused as being the mastermind of the attacks, from Afghanistan. The Taliban government’s refusal to extradite him resulted in the U.S. declaring war on Bin Laden and the Taliban regime, so a new era in the conflict between radical Islam, represented by the Taliban and Bin Laden, on the one side, and the U.S. and Western culture, on the other, emerged.<sup>19</sup>

## The September 11 Attacks and Their Aftermath

The 11 September attacks (often referred to as September 11th or 9/11) were a series of coordinated suicide attacks by the al-Qa’eda organization on the United States on 11 September, 2001.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>17</sup> See: Z. Veisi, “In the Search of Bin Laden,” Internet site of Bashgahe Andishe (Tehran), 2003, pp. 20-21.

<sup>18</sup> See: Y. Bodansky, “Bin Laden, The Man Who Declared War on America,” *Roseville Forum*, California, 1999, pp. 346- 347.

<sup>19</sup> See: *Al Hayat*, 12 February, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> See: G. Kepple, J.-P. Milelli, P. Ghazaleh, “Al Qaeda in Its Own Words,” *Harvard University Press*, 2008, p. 48.

That morning, 19 al-Qa'eda terrorists hijacked four commercial passenger jet airlines. The hijackers intentionally crashed two of the airliners into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing everyone on board and many others working in the buildings. Both buildings collapsed within two hours, destroying nearby buildings and damaging others. The hijackers crashed a third airliner into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. The fourth plane crashed into a field near Shanksville in rural Pennsylvania after some of its passengers and flight crew attempted to retake control of the plane, which the hijackers had redirected toward Washington, D.C. There were no survivors from any of the flights.<sup>21</sup>

The NATO council declared that the attacks on the U.S. were considered an attack on all NATO nations and, as such, satisfied Art 5 of the NATO charter. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the Bush administration declared a war on terror, with the stated goals of bringing Osama bin Laden and al-Qa'eda to justice and preventing the emergence of other terrorist networks. These goals would be accomplished by various means, including economic and military sanctions against states perceived as harboring terrorists and increasing global surveillance and intelligence sharing.<sup>22</sup>

The attacks were denounced by mass media and governments worldwide. Across the globe, nations offered pro-American support and solidarity. Leaders in most Middle Eastern countries and Afghanistan condemned the attacks. Iraq was a notable exception, coming forward immediately with an official statement to the effect that "the American cowboys are reaping the fruit of their crimes against humanity."<sup>23</sup>

Numerous countries, including Canada, China, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, Germany, India, and Pakistan introduced anti-terrorism legislation and froze the bank accounts of businesses and individuals they suspected of having al-Qa'eda ties.<sup>24</sup>

The international events and reactions immediately after the attacks affected the impact of the World Conference against Racism 2001, which ended in discord and international recriminations just three days before. As in the U.S., the aftermath of the attacks saw an increase in racial tension in other countries between Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>25</sup>

## Major Causes of the Emergence and Growth of "Radicalism" in Central Asia

The collapse of Communism and opening of state borders not only offered Central Asian Muslims new opportunities to practice their faith, but also allowed for the importation and development of radical forms of Islam. Although the majority of Central Asian Muslims do not support radical Islam, radical Islamic movements have attracted followers among a growing minority of the population.

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<sup>21</sup> See: St. Holmes, "Al Qaeda, 11 September, 2001," in: D. Gambetta, *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> See: J. Borger, "Blogger Bares Rumsfeld's Post 9/11 Orders," *Guardian News and Media Limited* (London), available at [[http://www.Guardian.co.UK/world/2006/Feb/24/freedom\\_of\\_information](http://www.Guardian.co.UK/world/2006/Feb/24/freedom_of_information)], 11 September, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> See: St. Holmes, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-82.

<sup>25</sup> See: J. Thayil, "645 Racial Incidents Reported in Week After September 11," *India Abroad*, available at [<http://www.Highbeam.com/doc/1p1-79281024-html>], 2001.

Increased support for radical Islam in Central Asia over the past decade has been attributed to foreign influences, coupled with a rise in government corruption and oppression, and deteriorating economic conditions. Radical Islamic groups active in Central Asia capitalized on the public discontent and provided a voice of opposition to the secular authoritarian governments.

Regional rulers responded by outlawing all non-government sanctioned Islamic activity and cracked down aggressively on both Islamic organizations and their followers.<sup>26</sup>

The Central Asian socioeconomic and political environment is conducive to the rise of radical Islamic groups, which may seriously destabilize the region. Bad governance, poverty, the dearth of opportunities for advancement, corruption, and crime could transform the area into the base for terrorism and inter-ethnic volatility.

Although people from all backgrounds have been drawn into radical Islamic groups, Islamists have been less successful in spreading their influence among the indigenous populations of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan than in gaining support from the Uzbek and Tajik minorities of the Central Asian states.<sup>27</sup>

Three related factors, including

- (1) the Islamization of Uzbeks and Tajiks,
- (2) sustained discrimination and religious persecution of the ethnic minorities, and
- (3) the growing authoritarianism of the Uzbek government, have contributed to the spread of radical ideas and popularity of extremist organizations among the Uzbek and Tajik ethnic groups; the continued government repression of Islam subsequently became another in a series of grievances that has attracted Uzbeks and Tajiks to radical Islamic groups.<sup>28</sup>

The rise of radicalization in Central Asia was influenced by and due to:

- The emergence of radical networks (i.e. al-Qa'eda, etc.);
- Particular radical forms of Islam, such as Wahhabism, gaining a lot of followers in Central Asia;
- The establishment of an institutional basis for radical Islam by networks that trained radical mullahs and built mosques in the post-Soviet era;
- An increasing “radicalizable” segment of the population as a result of increasing poverty and dislocation of ordinary Muslims;
- The growing anger and resentment by the Muslim population over the increasing stratification of society—a narrow elite are prospering while the masses are suffering. Dr. Schoeberlein argues that a key element is that Muslims believe the stratification is unjust and unfair and based on corruption;
- The failure of governments to reform and offer people a voice so that the only viable form of opposition has been through the underground Islamic movements. Communities see the underground not as a destabilizing force but as something they can relate to more than their political leaders.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See: P. Tiffany, “Islam in Central Asia: The Emergence and Growth of Radicalism in the Post-Communist Era,” Center for Technology and National Security Policy (CTNSP), 2003.

<sup>27</sup> See: M.Y. Omelicheva, *Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia*, International Studies Association, Chicago, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> See: A Conference on the “Islamization of Central Asia: Politics, Economics and Society,” Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 5th floor Conference Room, 11 June, 2003.



## External Factors and Afghanistan's Impact on Spreading Islamic Radicalism throughout Central Asia

Another significant factor behind the rise of radical political Islam in Central Asian countries has been influence from outside the region. At the beginning of the 1990s, the population and governments of regional states established official and non-official contacts with Muslim countries of the Middle East. Many Islamic emissaries came from the Middle East to import radical Islamic ideology. In addition, some citizens of Central Asia states studying religion in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey adopted radical views of political Islam and, upon returning home, began engaging in Islamist activities. Some were sent to terrorist camps for training purposes and returned as ready-made Warriors of Jihad.

Speaking of external factors, it is also important to mention that Central Asia is in geographical proximity to zones of conflict and instability where radical and political Islam has strong positions—Afghanistan, Chechnia, and, to a lesser degree, Xinjiang of China. Not only do these regions export radical Islamic ideas, there is also a considerable flow of Islamic radicals from these regions to Central Asia. Some of these people come legally as visitors, tourists, and students; some of them enter Central Asian countries as illegal migrants and refugees.<sup>30</sup>

Many scholars believed that emergence of radicalism in Central Asia and the eruption of civil war in Tajikistan are an extension of what is happening in Afghanistan. There is ethnic, cultural, and religious continuity between the population of Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries. After the Pashtuns, Tajiks are the second largest nationality in Afghanistan. There are four million Tajiks in Afghanistan, which is the largest number in any Central Asian state. Uzbeks and Turkmen rank third and fourth, respectively. Dushanbe is just 100 km from Afghanistan.

In the 1980s, a link was established between religious parties in Afghanistan and Central Asia. It has been told that it was during the Afghan Jihad that Islam was politicized and radical movements in Central Asia and in Tajikistan particularly started. Since the Tajiks of Afghanistan were more religious than the Uzbeks and had greater potential and capacity to exert the influence of Islamists on their ethnic cousins across the border, the radical parties of Afghanistan projected a strong presence along the Tajik border. The Afghan Mujahidin established contacts with the Tajiks and started crossing the border into Tajikistan. These links were fostered by same language, same culture, and same religion and ancestors.<sup>31</sup>

With the rise of Taliban phenomenon and threat of a rise in Islamic radicalism, the Taliban favored the Deobandi interpretation of Islam, and the suspected inroads by the Taliban militia into the Central Asian mainland have forced the Central Asian leaders and Russia to take specific steps.<sup>32</sup>

## Security Impact of Afghan Terror in Central Asia (Pre and Post 9/11 Era)

Crime and terror spread rapidly in Central Asia in the 1990s, mainly on the account of two factors: first, the surge in opiate production in Afghanistan in the 1990s, and second, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of new, weak states on its southern rim.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See: A Conference on the "Islamization of Central Asia: Politics, Economics and Society."

<sup>31</sup> See: K. Warikoo, *Central Asia Emerging New Order*, Haranand Publication, New Delhi, 1996, p. 211.

<sup>32</sup> See: R.H. Mognus, N. Eden, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx and Mujahid*, Pak Book Corporation, Pakistan, 1998, p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> See: S.E. Cornell, "The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration," Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Program, China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2006, pp. 36-67.

In Central Asia, it mainly took the form of a link between radical Islam and drug trafficking in Central Asia, a form also present in the Northern Caucasus. By the turn of the millennium, the link between crime and terror was perhaps the leading threat to Central Asia's security.

During the 1979-1989 resistance to Soviet occupation, opium production grew rapidly in Afghanistan. Insurgent groups were initially not known to have been involved in drug production, being mainly funded by external assistance. Nevertheless, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami, perhaps the strongest and most well-organized force among the Mujahidin group, benefiting from the lion's share of American and Pakistani funds for the resistance, gradually became deeply involved in opium production, as well as heroin processing, as the group sought to reduce its dependence on Pakistani's intelligence service, which distributed the funding.<sup>34</sup>

## Central Asia's Evolution in the Post 9/11 Era

The 11 September, 2001 attacks on the United States are credited with having changed much in world politics. Their aftermath also strongly affected the course of organized crime and its security impact in greater Central Asia. What consequences did Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) have for Afghanistan and Central Asia?

OEF, which led to the fall of the Taliban regime, dramatically changed the political situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia. This had twin implications for organized crime and the drug trafficking business: first, it meant an instant blow to the crime-terror nexus in the region, and second, it opened the way for the growth of criminal infiltration into politics in Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup>

Western engagement in Afghanistan did not reduce opium production in the country; it was actually restored to the pre-eradication levels and then gradually grew to new record levels. But OEF did remove the sanctuary that Afghanistan had formed for various terrorist movements, including al-Qa'eda, the IMU, as well as Chinese and Pakistani groups. Most importantly, the IMU was significantly cut down to size at the battle for Kunduz in November 2001, as they defended the last Taliban stronghold in the north of the country. Namangani was killed by U.S. forces in the battle (though unconfirmed rumors that he remains alive have circulated), while most of the IMU's fighting force was eliminated. Nevertheless, much of the IMU's infrastructure inside Central Asia remained unscathed by the war in Afghanistan. In fact, recent reports suggest that two detachments of the IMU remain in Afghanistan, with one group in the Paktia and Kunar provinces—areas where the anti-U.S. forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar are influential. The IMU also maintains a presence in several mountain passes of the Badakhshan province bordering Tajikistan.

Therefore, Operation Enduring Freedom led to a remarkable upsurge in the production of opiates in Afghanistan and continuously growing smuggling through Central Asia. Given the "pro-opium proclivities" of the Northern Alliance, this should have come as no surprise, since the Shura-i-Nazar in particular asserted its dominance over the post Taliban interim government. In 2002, the U.S. State Department noted that the Northern Alliance had "taken no action against cultivation and trafficking in the area it controls," an understatement given that the cultivated areas in Badakhshan had grown beyond compare.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See: J. Cooley, "Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism," *Pluto Press*, London, 2002, p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> See: "Drug Trade in Eurasia Database," Silk Road Studies Program, Uppsala, 24 August, 2005, available at [[http://www.silkroadstudies.org/drug\\_data\\_base.htm](http://www.silkroadstudies.org/drug_data_base.htm)].

<sup>36</sup> See: S.E. Cornell, "Narcotics, Radicalism and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 2005, pp. 619-639.

Soon after the terrorist attacks on America by the terrorist network of al-Qa'eda under Bin Laden on 11 September, 2001, all the Central Asian states offered overflight and other support to the U.S.-led coalition for anti-terrorist aims in Afghanistan.

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan hosted coalition troops and provided access to air bases of their own. In 2003, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan also endorsed coalition military action in Iraq, and Kazakhstan provided about two dozen troops for rebuilding. U.S. policy has emphasized bolstering the security of the Central Asian "front-line" states to help them combat terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and drug production and trafficking.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, the influence of the world's militarization against terrorism after the 11 September, 2001 could apparently be felt in Central Asian states as the most vulnerable neighbors of Afghanistan, the center of global terrorism. Each one of these states offered its full willingness to support the anti-terrorism coalition's activity in Afghanistan.

Since then, terrorist activities of nearly all of the Islamic extremists in the region were at least temporarily disrupted by the U.S.-led coalition actions. However, many observers assert that terrorist cells are re-forming in Central Asia and that surviving elements of terrorist groups such as the IMU, al-Qa'eda, and others are infiltrating there from Afghanistan and elsewhere.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

During the 1980s, Afghanistan was a magnet for volunteers from various Muslim countries, the Arab countries in particular, that came to the aid of the Afghan Mujahidin in their struggle against the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul and the Soviet invasion forces. During their stay in Afghanistan, the volunteers underwent military training and acquired rich combat experience in guerilla warfare.

The training of the Mujahidin and their volunteers usually took place in Pakistan, with the city of Peshawar (near the Afghan border) and its environs being the center and focus of Mujahidin activity.

The Muslims of the former U.S.S.R.'s Central Asia were also among the hundreds of volunteers who felt responsible for Afghanistan's critical situation, hence, joining the holy war (jihad) and shoulder-to-shoulder with the Afghan Mujahidin, they fought against the Soviets and pro-Soviet regime in Kabul until they achieved complete victory. After that, volunteers were no longer needed in Afghanistan and they began to return to their countries of origin.

After the fall of the U.S.S.R. and subsequently the independence of Central Asian Muslim republics, a large number of the region's radical Islamists went to Afghanistan and underwent training in guerilla warfare and terror under the various Mujahidin factions in Islamic education schools (madrasas), where the principal ideology being taught was "fundamentalism" or "Islamism" aiming to topple the corrupt secular regimes and to establish an Islamic state based on the Shariah. Various Islamic parties and radical movements were subsequently established in the region; especially in Uzbekistan, under the leadership of individuals who had been trained in the madrasas of Afghanistan, the main locus of the terrorist activities of extremist groups such as Bin Laden's al-Qa'eda.

Their clearly defined ideology and extremist actions made the region's totalitarian regimes worried and put their current position at risk. This created grounds in the republics of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan for a clash between the two sides.

Although, today, the region's radical Islamic groups influenced by the Afghan extremists enjoy a great number of recruits, each one volunteering for a different reason, including poverty, belonging,

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<sup>37</sup> See: J. Nichol, "Central Asia: Security, Internal Affairs & U.S. Interests," Nova Science Publishers, New York, 2008, p. viii (Soft cover)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

ideology/identity, or injustice, the existing secular regime's imposed dictatorship and strict police controls prevent these groups from implementing their defined plans and violent actions, at least, temporarily and for a short period.

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