

EPILOGUE

AFGHANISTAN TODAY

It is unclear in what direction the political situation in Afghanistan is developing. The general perception is that it is part of a wider regional crisis, one that becomes more complicated every day on account of the imbalance of power and the atmosphere of suspicion and political mistrust.

Afghanistan has once again been transformed into an arena in which the powers of the world lock horns. Given the political and military vacuum in the country, it serves as a superpower laboratory for the development of influence and alliances.

The departure of George Bush and the arrival of Barack Obama has raised hopes among some Afghans, but the situation is getting more and more complicated on the regional level. America no longer occupies the position it did in 2001, when it invaded Afghanistan for no other reason than a vague notion of revenge. It is also not where it was in 2003 when it invaded Iraq, using weapons of mass destruction as an excuse to grab the country's oil reserves. America's reputation has changed. It is now known all over the world as a breaker of laws, a violator of human rights, and a provoker of hatred. Matters have reached the stage where American citizens are reluctant to show their passports in certain countries out of fear or embarrassment for the deeds of their own nation.

In economic terms, America is in crisis: unemployment is rising by the day, prices are soaring and major companies are going bust, one after the other. As America seeks new supply routes through Russia or the former Soviet Central Asian republics, its central problem with Pakistan is becoming more and more obvious. Pakistan under Pervez Musharraf was a good ally for America. It oppressed Muslims, allowed

its soil to be used for the destruction of another Muslim country, helped in the killing of innocent Afghan civilians, suppressed Islamic parties within Pakistan and cultivated the seeds of hatred between the government and the people.

It now seems as if the udders of the American cash cow are drying up.

The Arab world also appears to be turning away from America because of its enmity with the Muslim world. This are many reasons for this, but the strong support that America gives the Israelis against the Palestinians plays an especially important role. Arab leaders cannot overlook this.

In addition, no one can fail to grasp the significance of American defense installations in Georgia, Ukraine and the Czech Republic. But the growing strength of Russia, the dramatic development of China, and Iran's readiness to obtain nuclear weapons is further challenging America's power.

In spite of all these challenges, President Obama's political strategy is still based on the assumption that America is the sole world leader. This is, in itself, a confusing problem and an incurable disease. America is now working on a new Afghan strategy, and is planning to replace Hamid Karzai with another president. It has to show Afghans how much America has usurped their independence by putting another puppet in power. In this respect Obama could be even more dangerous than Bush. He may be willing to bring change and peace, but he will come under pressure from the intelligence agencies, who will have a strong influence on his decisions.

There are many signs that the Americans intend to stay in Afghanistan for a long time. They want to cover up their failure and improve their image. They are leaving Iraq because of the growing resistance in the Arab world. Economically, the Arab countries are very important for America.

America does not want to be defeated by the Arabs, and nor does it want to further harm its relations with the Arab world. Afghanistan, however, is easy for America; they are fighting an ethnic group that does not have extensive roots anywhere else in the world. They can continue to fight and ignore civilian casualties and the suffering of the Afghan people without facing a strong reaction throughout the world. This would be a problem for them if they were fighting in Palestine or continued to fight in Iraq.

The gap is widening between the Afghans and the foreign invaders, and the problems are getting worse and worse. The oppressed Afghans have a great deal of patience; unfortunately the world also has a lot of patience with their suffering and cares nothing for their blood.

Afghanistan is the most oppressed country in the world. Afghans take their revenge in silence, even if they have to sacrifice themselves in the process. No Afghan, least of all a Pashtun, believes that America is doing anything other than killing people and sowing hatred. The primary goal of the invasion was to render Afghanistan powerless; even those Afghans who at first marched to the American tune are starting to feel this way.

The security situation in Afghanistan is getting worse by the day. The foreign invaders and the Afghan authorities have even less control than before. In villages and districts life is getting harder and harder for the people, especially for businessmen and those who have livestock or other possessions. People feel insecure and are trying to get their investments out of the country.

There is a direct relation between security and the economy. As the security situation deteriorates, the economy and the political situation follow suit. Obama now thinks he should increase the number of troops and send thirty thousand more soldiers. He is also encouraging other countries to increase their troop numbers. They think it will help the security situation. They do not know that more troops mean more blood. What's more, it will lead to further tension with our neighbours. The more troops there are, the harder it will be to get them out. Obama's new strategy might turn the problems of Afghanistan into problems for the entire region far beyond what we are seeing right now.

The solution, in my opinion, is for Americans to revise the war policy they developed under their insufferable last president Bush and put an end to the conflict. They should begin a campaign of peace instead of war. Only a major revision of their strategy can help both Afghanistan and America alike.

The entire southern region—Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, Uruzgan, Farah and Nimroz—is interconnected economically and in terms of security. One province can directly influence others, especially in the southwest, southeast, and central region. But the political impact of the southern provinces also has a direct bearing on the north and the west as well, and on the tribal areas reaching far into Pakistan.

Some people, however, just want to oppress the Pashtuns and the South. They either do it directly, or by encouraging the foreigners. They know that oppressing one of their fellow Afghans is only to oppress themselves, but they do it for the money.

In 2007, the political, economic and security situation in the southern provinces was very complicated. Lots of foreigners and many more Afghans lost their lives. In many rural areas in the south the relationship between the foreign troops and the local population shifted from mere hatred to outright enmity. If you went out onto the streets and were to ask every single Afghan how he thought the Americans were treating the people, 95 per cent would tell you that they are the enemies of the Afghan people. The only people who would answer differently are those who work with the Americans, but they are hated even more than the Americans themselves. As for the British, I think everyone agrees that they have come to Afghanistan to avenge their fathers and grandfathers.

Too often it is forgotten that it is the Afghan people who suffer; it is they—the farmer and the shopkeeper—who pay the price for bad policy and uninformed decisions. Our men and women, friends and brothers are losing their lives and their independence while our country is turned to ruins in the name of reconstruction. Why are our hands and feet shackled? What is it that the foreigners want from us?

Everybody lost under the Bush administration. Only the enemies of Afghans and Americans benefited under his rule. But is President Obama any different, you might ask? It is all too obvious that his hands will also be stained by the blood of Afghans. He has already announced that he will send more troops. Obama was elected by a wide margin, but his campaign slogan, ‘change we can believe in’, was vague and unclear. Obama is also from a minority—the minority that once were slaves—who were deprived of their rights for centuries in America. A minority that was neglected economically and politically. But in the end, President Obama may be manipulated even more than Bush was.

We see the beginning of this process in the increase of the number of American soldiers in Afghanistan, and in the threats issued to other countries. If Obama truly wants to save America from collapse and end the enmity towards the Islamic world and Muslims in general, he should be more cautious.

We all know that increasing troop numbers in Afghanistan was not Obama’s plan or suggestion. It was decided before he even got elected.

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Senior American advisers say that a troop surge will bring the situation under control. America should take a look at Afghanistan's history: we have been invaded many times before. How many troops did their predecessors bring? And why did they fail? They should look at Iraq. A million lives were lost while 300,000 US soldiers were there, and the killing continues to this day.

Americans should know that they are no longer thought of as a people of freedom and democracy. They have sown the seeds of hatred throughout the world. Under their new banner they have declared a war on terrorism and terrorists, but the very term "terrorist" is of their own making. The *jihad* against them will never stop as long as America doesn't take steps to correct its mistakes.

Be warned, you are not prepared for Afghanistan! Yes, there is hunger and poverty; our country lies in ruins and our economy is destroyed. Be this as it may, it is not the issue. In Afghanistan, our ideology is not for sale. There is no easy solution in Afghanistan, and America will never solve the problems through tribal militias or *arbakais*. Turning brothers against each other can only create more conflict. These militias will be an uncontrollable force, outside the army and police. America will awaken a sleeping monster. All of this has happened before. We have seen it before and we can still see its effect even now.

Some Americans and pro-Western Afghans believe that America should first strengthen its military and political position, and then pave the way for peace talks. Perhaps that is the reasoning behind the increase in troops. It may have worked for them in Iraq, but Afghanistan is very different from Iraq or the West. Afghans do not back down. If they are in a weak position their thoughts will be consumed with fighting for their rights and plotting their revenge. America is in a strong position; any attempt to increase its power will only push more people to fight.

America invaded Afghanistan, she violated Afghanistan's sovereignty, threw thousands in prison, tortured and humiliated them and killed tens of thousands of Afghan citizens. Obama and America should apologize for this instead of continuing the violence. They should seek a real peace. This is important for everybody. We all talk about peace, but the approaches are very different. Perhaps it is true that the Americans want peace as well. But it is their own peace, on their own terms. That is not peace; it is war by the name of peace.

America needs to treat Afghanistan as a sovereign country and realize what rights she has here. Only if America is publicly recognized

and if the Afghan government independently grants them rights, only then will the Afghan people accept her presence here.

As for now, America's goal in the region is unclear. What do they want? How much longer are they going to kill and oppress people and call it "the war on terrorism"? When the Americans first came to Afghanistan, there were only a few of them. Then it reached 6,000, then 18,000, after that, 30,000. Now we see that it will soon be twice that—64,000. Perhaps next year it will be 100,000. What does this mean?

Who will control them? Who will still be able to claim that Afghanistan is an independent country? We are very far from a timetable for withdrawal. If the Americans continue to be stubborn instead of working towards a realistic timeline for withdrawal, they will strengthen their bases, construct more airports and ammunition depots, and amass supplies for dozens of years. They will try to profit from the poor conditions that Afghans find themselves in, and will buy Afghans with the money that will then be used against them.

Afghans need to unite. They must not let themselves and their children serve the Americans, killing other Afghans and being killed themselves. They should wait and see what happens. Afghans need to know that their deaths will harm only themselves. No one will cry for them—indeed, others may even be happy that they have been killed.

Pakistani Jails

The inhuman American jails have provoked criticism and objections from human rights organizations around the world. They are famous for their illegal oppression of Muslims. But they are a reality in this world. They torture people and they deprive them of their human rights; they perpetrate injustice. They have violated international and US law, as well as the 1946 Geneva Conventions. This has happened, and still is happening, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantánamo and other places far from the public eye.

But other countries that have done even worse than the Americans have escaped notice. Countries like Egypt, Jordan and Pakistan, supported by the United States, are committing acts that cannot be justified by any law, Islamic or otherwise. Look at Pakistan, our neighbour. How does it treat Afghans?

Pakistan, which plays a key role in Asia, is so famous for treachery that it is said they can get milk from a bull. They have two tongues in

one mouth, and two faces on one head so they can speak everybody's language; they use everybody, deceive everybody. They deceive the Arabs under the guise of Islamic nuclear power, saying that they are defending Islam and Islamic countries. They milk America and Europe in the alliance against terrorism, and they have been deceiving Pakistani and other Muslims around the world in the name of the Kashmiri *jihad*. But behind the curtain, they have been betraying everyone.

Their Islam and their *jihad* were to destroy their neighbouring Islamic country together with the infidels. They handed over their airports to the Americans so they could kill Muslims and destroy an Islamic country. Their loyalty to the Arabs is so great that they sold diplomats, journalists and *mujahedeen* for dollars. Like animals. God knows whether they will ever use their nuclear bomb to defend Muslims and Islam. They might use their weapons—as they have used everything else—against Muslims.

Afghans are imprisoned around the world. Governments come up with new excuses to torture and imprison us every day. Much is known about how Afghans are tortured in Afghanistan, Iran, Guantánamo and American prisons, but little is known about the situation in Pakistan.

Pakistan manufactures the charges, political or criminal, often extorting money from Afghans. Criminals tend to get off lightly compared to political prisoners in Pakistan. People imprisoned on criminal charges at least have the chance of a trial and often manage to bribe officials to be released. In the prison they also have a certain degree of freedom unknown to the political prisoner. In Pakistani jails, criminals can meet with their relatives by bribing officials, even though they too can remain in prison for many years without being charged; they may not be given the right to hire a lawyer; they can be beaten or tortured into confessing, and their voices can be silenced.

But the life of political prisoners is much harder, especially with the treacherous game of “terrorism” being played these days. Most of the victims of this deadly game are Afghans. The status of Afghan prisoners is very different from that of Pakistanis. For one thing, Pakistani prisoners can communicate easily. Also, politicians in Pakistan can help Pakistani prisoners. Afghans are treated as second-class citizens by the Pakistani police. Once they have Afghans in their claws, they can do whatever they want with them. Most of the political prisoners are held by the ISI. They are isolated; there is no law in the places they are being held.

There are many Afghans who have been imprisoned for the past five or six years in Pakistani intelligence prisons. There are many more who have been imprisoned for the past two or three years, with no future and no hope. Their relatives cannot find out what has happened to them, they cannot ascertain what the charges are, or what lies in store for them. They cannot even find out whether their son, brother or father is imprisoned, or whether they are sick or in good health. They have no connection to the outside world at all, not through the Red Cross, not by letters, not by telephone or video.

They remain in their cells as dead men, waiting for the Day of Judgement.

May God save these prisoners from the Pakistani jails. For the relatives, life is hard, but it is much worse for the prisoners themselves. Their time in prison is a tragedy. They are stripped of all dignity. When the Pakistani ISI comes to arrest somebody, they raid his house just like the Americans do in Afghanistan. They turn the whole house upside down. They tie up the rest of the family members and put black sacks on their heads. Sometimes they even arrest other members of the family, or even guests that just happen to be there. They curse the prisoners all the way to the detention centres. They treat them in an inhumane and un-Islamic way.

During interrogation, they are tortured and often deprived of sleep. They can only go to the toilet once every 24 hours. They are not allowed to speak to each other. They can only communicate by gesture. If they are caught talking to each other, they face severe punishment.

One prisoner told me his story: "When I was arrested by Pakistani spies", he said, "they took me to a very frightening place. It was a small, narrow room, and everything—ceiling, floor, walls, door—was painted black. You could not tell the difference between night and day. Only when they were taking us to the interrogation room did we see a small lamp switched on.

"That was it. The first time they took me to that room, I became short of breath, my blood pressure skyrocketed. I felt as if I had been thrown into a grave. I screamed and shouted, but was cursed in response. After shouting for a while, a soft voice touched my ears, speaking. 'Hey, new prisoner. You won't find anybody to be kind to you even if you scream until the morning. So better to wait instead of screaming and shouting. Ask God for help.' I calmed down a little bit after that.

“When Pakistani soldiers came to my cell and turned on the light, I realized how black the walls and ceiling were. It was very frightening. I had never seen such a place. There were pegs on the walls and they would tie the prisoners to them. The pegs had rings, two rings for the hands and two for the feet. There was a fifth ring as well that they used to tie the prisoners’ necks with a rope. When they tortured the prisoners, their blood stained the walls. When I looked at the Pakistani soldiers, wearing their black clothes and black hats, the only thing I could see were their evil eyes moving. Then I fainted. They woke me up and put a black sack on my head, then took me to another place. I could only hear the voice of the interrogators there, speaking English with an American accent. One of them would ask me questions and the other would translate his questions and translate my answers back.

“This continued for a month. Once a week I was interrogated by the Americans, and two or three times I was interrogated by the Pakistani officers. Then the situation changed. I was thrown into another small room with three other Afghan prisoners. The new cell had a light and we had a chance to go to the bathroom twice every 24 hours”.

This prisoner, who spent a year and three months in that secret prison, never heard from his family the whole time. They did not know where he was.

“When the Pakistani intelligence officers and the American interrogators understood that I was just an ordinary Afghan, not connected to any political party, and that I had no information about *Al Qaeda* or the *Taliban*, they decided to release me. They came to me in the middle of the night, handcuffed me and shackled my legs, put a black sack over my head, and threw me in a car. After a three-hour drive they stopped somewhere and in complete silence they took me out of the car, threw me on the ground, released the handcuffs and removed the sack from my head. It was very cold. The Pakistani soldiers told me: ‘You are free now, but you have to do two things. First, you should not move for fifteen minutes, until we get far away. Second, you should never tell anyone what happened to you. If you do, then you will face worse consequences than this. You should know that you will never be safe from us’.

Many others have had much worse experiences. Those who were handed over to the Americans or to the Afghan government after imprisonment and interrogation by Pakistanis would be as happy as if they had been freed.

I asked many prisoners this question: what is the difference between Pakistani jails and Afghan or American jails? The answer was always the same: Afghan and American prisons were much better than the Pakistani ones.

Men like Sayyed Mohammad Akbar Agha, Doctor Yasar, Mufti Abdul Hakim, and hundreds of other prisoners became disabled due to the beatings and the torture inflicted on them during their imprisonment. Some of them cannot work any more on account of their injuries.

We have tried our best to get human rights organizations and the international community to evaluate the prisons that Americans and Pakistanis made for Afghans on Pakistani territory, in order to try to help the prisoners, but so far even an organization like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is still waiting to obtain permission to visit, to connect prisoners with their families and to inspect these prisons. Even though many human rights organizations have tried to influence America, Pakistan and Afghanistan to respect human rights, nothing has changed yet. Only God knows what will happen.

Why the United States is Failing

Although the United States of America and its NATO allies still claim success, in fact they are pulling the wool over their peoples' eyes and saying that they have achieved a lot in Afghanistan.

They do not mention the words "failure" or "defeat", no matter how many difficulties they face. But the truth is that after eight years in the region, dozens of problems have arisen, blood is being shed, poverty and unemployment are at their peak and the roots of the economy are drying up. Security is limited to the cities and towns. The hatred between the two sides is increasing, to such an extent that now the soldiers of America and NATO cannot even secure themselves—let alone begin to bring security to the Afghan people. Instead of turning their guns and tanks on the so-called enemy, they are pointing them at the oppressed people.

This whole plot of war was decided very soon after 11 September 2001. America's blood had already started to boil before that time; they were just looking for an excuse. America should have used its mind and its logic after 11 September; they should have investigated. Their haste was their hubris.

The war itself was their biggest mistake: attacking Afghanistan was the wrong move after 11 September. The Bonn conference that imposed

American ideas and inflicted certain Afghans on the Afghan people was their second mistake. The alliances they made, cooperating with known warlords and war-criminals and helping the same people back to power who had once before ruined the country and bled its people—all of this was a policy failure. Afghanistan will pay the price for that mistake. An attempt to follow the war effort with a targeted campaign to hunt and kill the *Taliban* has much to do with the conditions right now in the south and east of the country.

Many of the rules and laws that were imposed on Afghanistan interfere with its culture, a mistake that has been made over and over again by foreign invaders and Afghan rulers alike. Disrespect for religious values, and the use of religious symbols to pressure prisoners, both these things were coupled together with a policy of hate and bias toward religious *madrassas* which has alienated much of the rural population. Putting a price on the head of prominent Muslims, as well as interfering in the election process and the *Loya Jirga* directly robbed the new government of its legitimacy. And finally the prisons, the decision to violate all human rights, to place Afghans outside any law, the silence and complicity of America and the international community has lost the respect and trust of the Afghan people. Without trust there will be no peace. Still people believe that they can find a military solution to a political problem, ignoring all lessons from history.

The decision to invade Afghanistan and wage war against its people was a mistake, because it drove America and Afghanistan into a quagmire. The door was wide open for talks and negotiations; there was a way that would have spared many lives. But America was sure that it would win the war easily. The Afghan puppets had assured them that Afghans would welcome the Americans and that people were unhappy with some of the laws of the *Taliban*. The leaders of the Northern Alliance had also given the green light. In essence, the sanctions of the United Nations and the lack of recognition for our government had sabotaged our economy and robbed us of the time we would have needed to progress. But America rushed into a vengeful and hasty decision to wage war, invading the defenseless territory of Afghanistan. It was a mistake. They should have sought a way towards peace and negotiation instead.

The Bonn Conference, through which America imposed its will by bringing together a small group of Afghans, often hailed as a groundbreaking moment, was a bigger violation of Afghanistan's independence than the American invasion. Fundamentally there were two problems with the Bonn Conference; America gave power to the Northern Alliance in order to strengthen its own position, and suppressed Pashtuns while calling them "*Taliban*". But an important point was overlooked—there were no real representatives of Afghanistan at Bonn, or at least they were not given the opportunity to make decisions about what Afghans really wanted. The decisions made were illegal in any sense.

On account of the American invasion and the toxic decisions of Bonn, certain people—those whose cruel swords had grown blunt from overuse on the Afghan people—were welcomed into power. The criminals from the Communist regimes and those selfish looters who called themselves "*mujahedeen*" are responsible for much of the destruction and tragedies of the past. They wanted to take power once again to trade in people's lives, and to bring back their terror and looting. They overshadowed even the crimes of the Soviets. They drew America into a quagmire and spawned many problems. These groups are the enemies of the real *mujahedeen* and of the *Taliban*.

America has been quite successful in bribing people in Afghanistan. They started handing out sacks of dollars to the Northern Alliance—beginning in Panjshir—to get them to use their ground forces against the *Taliban*. After the American forces descended during the collapse of the *Taliban*, they accelerated the bribing process and they continue it to this day. But America used its money for other things as well, hiring puppet spies among the Afghans to strengthen its position, and by putting a bounty on the heads of the leaders of the *Taliban* and *Al Qaeda*. They exploited the poverty of Afghans to the utmost. On the say-so of these greedy spies, innocent people were martyred, hatred was spawned, and the gap between the people and the government widened. Afghanistan's independence was entombed. It also blackened America's reputation.

The attack on Afghan culture and its Islamic values has exposed the true face of the Americans to the world. The enmity of America with Islam and Muslims as expressed by this thing they call "terrorism" is clear for all to see. There are many examples: Firstly, when the Americans came to Afghanistan for the first time, they thought there would

encounter no resistance. They closed all the religious *madrassas* with the help of their puppets; even in the mosques, only young boys were allowed. The education of students in the mosques stopped. This plan was implemented mostly in Kandahar, Zabul, Uruzgan and some other provinces. The fact that this plan was not completed is a different issue. Secondly, eliminating the word “*jihad*” from the curriculum of the schools and some other subjects was extremely worrying. *Jihad* is a central concept within Islam, and understanding it is an obligation of every single Muslim. Thirdly, efforts to give men and women equal rights in everything and paving the way for co-education under the name of international law, and allowing women to take off their scarves; this was another such plan. They also started enmity with all Islamic organizations in the world, especially *jihadi* organizations, and tried to eliminate them. There are lots of examples, but we might single out their support for Israel and for the destruction of the elected government of Palestine.

Attacks on Afghan culture by the Americans are now a common occurrence. Now it happens in every corner of the country under one guise or another. For example: when the American invaders target an Afghan they believe to be an enemy according to their puppet spies’ reports, first they identify his house in the village. Then in the middle of the night they land with their helicopters. The American soldiers raid the house. Prior to entering the house, they blow up the gate instead of knocking, they strip the person they are targeting in front of his wife and family. They search women and they break open boxes instead of unlocking them. Then they take the person away like wild animals, or they just kill him with bullets or knives in front of his wife and children, in his own house. Let’s stay with this example—legally, how many violations have they committed? One: entering people’s houses without their permission; two: searching the women; three: stripping the person in front of his family members. It would be easy to fill a book naming all the abuses and crimes they commit.

The Americans have put prices on the heads of many people, have put people on a blacklist, and taken their God-given rights from them. They have provoked people into fighting them out of self-defence. This is not conducive to peace. Why then, when the Afghan administration claims that it is trying to conduct peace talks with Hekmatyar, why is the American administration still promising millions of dollars to whoever finds him?

The American government still holds strong prejudices against Islamic *madrassas*. At times it seems that it sees no difference between terrorist training camps and the religious schools, a position that is damaging its relationship with the Muslim world. Based on the poor understanding of the *madrassas*, America has long set out to pressure Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries to change their curriculum and has led a campaign against *Ulemaa*' who preach about *jihad*. Rumours that pass through the Islamic world suggest that a number of *Ulemaa*' were assassinated as part of the United States' plan to influence Islamic teaching.

The *Loya Jirga* was a farce: America pressured representatives on issues of hiring and firing of personnel; agendas were prepared in advance; UNAMA pushed people; bribes and back-room deals were the norm; and some representatives were even threatened and were taken to Guantánamo. *Loya Jirgas* and other such institutions are an integral part of Afghanistan's culture, and are the traditional way to find solutions to problems. Using these traditional institutions can solve many of Afghanistan's problems, but attempts to manipulate them will backfire and cause more damage than good, in particular when they are poorly understood to begin with.

America made an irreversible mistake in their choice of friends, ignoring their history with Afghanistan. The Afghan allies they chose were often warlords who had returned to Afghanistan in the wake of battle, using America and damaging the very foundations of the new Afghanistan they planned to create. Another strategic mistake was to allow Great Britain to return to the south, or Afghanistan in general. The British Empire had fought three wars with Afghanistan, and their main battles were with the Pashtun tribes in southern Afghanistan. They were responsible for the split of the tribal lands, establishing the Durand line. Whatever the reality might be, British troops in southern Afghanistan, in particular in Helmand, will be measured not on their current actions but by the history they have, the battles that were fought in past. The local population has not forgotten, and, many believe, neither have the British. Many of the villages that see heavy fighting and casualties today are the same that did so some ninety years ago.

There are even fundamental flaws in the very construction of the Afghan government that show a lack of understanding of Afghanistan and its people. From the very beginning Pashtuns were underrepre-

sented, even though President Karzai is Pashtun; this alone is an inbuilt weakness. Furthermore, the government system and its mechanisms are far too advanced for Afghanistan. There is a lack of control within departments and ministries, with little means of ensuring that subordinate departments and ranks obey the orders of their superiors. Parts of the government appear to be under the control of foreigners and not the President, his ministers or the cabinet. There are government officials and members of the cabinet that are mistrusted by the population. The very structure of the government, the division of the army, the cabinet and the other organs have been decided by foreigners.

Information is key to any conflict. The foreign troops in Afghanistan have poor intelligence, though, and have too often listened to people who provided them with false information, who use the foreigners for their own goals and target their own enemies or competitors. America often admits mistakes, but the public never hears that an informant who provided them with false information that led mistakes is to be punished and held accountable for his action. As long as this is the case, we must assume that America cooperates with them and that military operations, based on false information, are actually planned and executed for other reasons, and are not in fact mistakes after all.

The US and its allies solely rely on force, and even the so-called peace talks are accompanied by threats. It is astonishing that after eight years, with tens of thousands of troops, warplanes and equipment, and a vast national army, facing down some estimated ten thousand insurgents, leaving some two-thirds of the country unstable, that foreign governments still believe that brute force is a solution to the crisis. And still they send more troops. The current conflict is a political conflict and as such cannot be solved by the gun.

The biggest mistake of American policy makers so far might be their profound lack of understanding of their enemy. The US brought an overwhelming force to Afghanistan. They arrived with a superior war machine, trying to swat mosquitoes with sledgehammers, destroying the little that was left of Afghanistan and causing countless casualties on their mission, knocking down many more walls than killing insects. Till this very day it is this lack of understanding and their own prejudices that they still struggle with.

The new Obama administration appears to be making as many mistakes as their predecessors. The decision to bring a special envoy who will diminish the authority of Afghan officials, coupled with the appoint-

ment of General McChrystal, a man who was previously responsible for covert operations, are both steps in the wrong direction. The mounting number of civilian casualties together with the ill-made attempts to cover up massacres will doubtless further alienate the Afghan people. America now is at risk of following the same path as the Soviet Union. If America does not wake up from its trance of self-proclaimed omnipotence, Afghanistan will be its demise.

Ever since America invaded Afghanistan, they have come to many junctions in the road and all too often they have made the wrong decisions. They are on unfamiliar territory, and they know little about Afghanistan. Today the situation in my birthplace of Kandahar looks like an unhealthy amalgam of the worst of the Russian times and the civil war that followed. Once again Afghans are fighting each other, and President Obama, who had the option to choose a new path, seems to have made his mind up. And once again foreign troops will arrive in great numbers trying to solve a problem they are part of. How much longer will foreigners who fail to understand Afghanistan and its culture make decisions for the Afghan nation? How much longer will the Afghan people wait and endure? Only God knows. Once again I pray for peace. Once again I pray for Afghanistan, my home.

Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef
Kabul, June 2009