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ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN SOUTH ASIA

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This is the second of a three-part article. "Part III: Bangladesh" is forthcoming. Jere Van Dyk is currently a Senior Fellow at the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs and a consultant on South Asia and al-Qaeda to CBS News. Mr. Van Dyk grew up in Washington State and attended the University of Oregon. He served in the U.S. Army 1970 to 1971. He later attended the Sorbonne and l'Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris. From 1973 to 1977 he was a staff assistant to Senator Henry M. Jackson in the U.S. Senate. In the early 1980s, he covered the Afghan-Soviet war for *The New York Times*, for which he was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. He is the author of *In Afghanistan*. He helped start, with Zalmay Khalilzad, Friends of Afghanistan, which was overseen by the National Security Council and the State Department. He has taught "the politics of Islam" at New York University. Mr. Van Dyk has worked either for *National Geographic Magazine* or *The New York Times* in South Asia, East Africa, South America, Tibet, the former Soviet Union, Japan, and North America.

Part II: Afghanistan and Pakistan

Mansoor, in his 50s, a former Afghan Army major, now an intelligence officer for the U.S. Army, shifted his short-stock Kalashnikov rifle from one shoulder to the other. He had a heavy black beard, wore a black turban with silver stripes, and a patou, a thin wool blanket, over his shoulders. He hid his rifle beneath it.

"We can't stay here too long. This is a dangerous area," he said. "If anyone knows there is a foreigner here, we will be in trouble." An hour before, as we drove on a bumpy, muddy, rutted track up into the mountains, we saw two men praying by a rushing stream. They had thick dark beards, wore black turbans and were standing with their heads bowed, facing southeast towards Mecca.

"That is Mullah Tarah," he said, "leader of the Taliban for this area." I glanced around and we drove on. The road wound around the edge of a mountain. We were in Khost Province, southeast Afghanistan, five miles from the Pakistani border. If he saw that I, a foreigner, an infidel, was there, I was afraid he would come after us.

Two trucks, filled with chopped up trees for firewood, made their way along a river bed down below, coming from Pakistan. It was one of the main routes, my guides said, for the Taliban who were in Pakistan to come into the country. The sun was shining. The hills were brown, with small trees. There were small plots of plowed land, for wheat and corn, down below by the river. Where the sun didn't reach there was snow.

There were no electric lines, no police, no sign besides our vehicle and the trucks, of the modern world. Nothing had changed since I lived in this region in the winter of 1981.

We were four hours by truck from Khost, the provincial capital. There were dusty streets, parks, low buildings, willow trees, open sewers, the governor's house, and army and police checkpoints. That morning I didn't see one woman in the streets. Almost all the men, it seemed, were bearded. Some carried rifles.

I tried not to talk as we walked through the streets. I was bearded, my hair was long, I wore Afghan clothes, but I had to be careful. Half the city supported the U.S., half supported the Taliban. It was safer to walk in Khost in 2002 and 2003 than it was today.

In the 1980s, the Soviet Union had a base here at the airfield. I remembered walking by in the distance, in single file on an open plain, with the mujahideen, and seeing the Soviet helicopters sitting in a row, shining in the morning sun. Today the U.S. and NATO have bases here. In 1981 we were afraid of Soviet soldiers. Today I was afraid of the Taliban and its sympathizers.

Soviet convoys patrolled the roads, as U.S. and NATO convoys do today. I had lived in the mountains of Shi-i-Khot nearby with Jalaladin Haqqani, a commander under Maulavi Yunus Khalis, and his men. Osama bin Laden stayed with Khalis when he returned from Sudan in 1996 and after 9/11 before he went up to Tora Bora.

To reach him, I rode in a car with Afghans from Peshawar down through Miramshah, the capital of South Waziristan. I wore Afghan clothes and a turban. We passed through Pakistani army checkpoints, in a region off limits to reporters then and as it is today.

In the 19th century, the British fought the tough Pashtun tribesmen and built bases there, but when this area became part of Pakistan, the Pakistanis found that because they and the tribesmen were all Muslims, they only needed to maintain a light military presence.

The farther we went and the closer I came, now walking, to the Afghan border, the fewer soldiers I saw until I didn't see any. I crossed the border—it was as ill-defined then as it is today—and followed a narrow goat path up into the mountains and within a couple of days reached Haqqani's baked mud compound.

The walls were high, and there were many small rooms inside. A large family had lived there. When I entered Haqqani's room, he was sitting on carpet on the dirt floor with three men studying a map. There was an AK-47 rifle with a scope leaning against the wall. Every man I had seen after leaving Peshawar seemed to carry a heavy, bolt-action, British Lee-Enfield rifle, the same rifle used in the U.S. Civil War.

There were few Kalashnikovs around then. They later became known as Afghan jewelry because every man carried one. There were some of Chinese manufacture, a few Indian AKM rifles, and small Indian submachine guns, but little else. The U.S. operation to fight the Soviets with the Afghans as a proxy army was just beginning. As I sat against the wall that afternoon a man gave me a plate of honey to go with my tea.

The U.S. and the Mujahideen were allies then fighting, each for its own reasons, the godless communists of the Soviet Union. There were about 30 men with Jalaladin in the compound. The Soviets had bombed houses nearby, and almost everyone in the valley had fled to Pakistan. There was little to eat.

The Soviet helicopters flew slowly over us, but mostly kept going. Almost all the men were from the area where we lived, just as today the Taliban fight in their own region. Only one man per family was allowed to fight at one time. There were anti-aircraft guns on the edges of the villages I slept in as I hiked in, and caches of ammunition hidden in homes. In one, men fired brazenly at a helicopter, showing off, but it kept going.

Haqqani's men laughed, joked, prayed, went on missions, and talked about fighting and sometimes, if they weren't married, women. I learned later that we called them Muslim fundamentalists, but it was a new phrase then. I saw them as normal, religious men, fighting for the only things they knew: their families, their villages, their culture, their country, and their religion.

One day I sat in a small house on a dirt floor in a village and watched a mullah, which means in Afghanistan a man who has attended a madrasah. He has not necessarily graduated, like a maulavi. The mullah taught half a dozen boys, aged about five or six, the alphabet in Arabic.

The boys held a small ping-pong like paddle, with a blackboard on it, on which they wrote letters and numbers. It was the only school in the village. A mullah, like a circuit rider in the old American West, would go from one village to the next teaching boys the *Koran* and how to read and write.

There were no secular schools. They weren't open in the winter. There was no heat. I didn't know then that the mujahideen burned down schools, anything tied to the

godless communist government, just as the Taliban burn down schools because they are tied to the Western-backed government in Kabul.

In November 2006 I went to see Alhajid Mahaiuddin Balouch, President Karzai's advisor on Religious and Tribal Affairs. There was snow on the ground and guards outside. "Islam is not just a religion, but the basis of Afghan culture," he said. He sat on a sofa in his office. His desk was piled high with books and papers. "The British and the Soviets were defeated on the basis of religion."

Whenever Jalaladin's men bowed in prayer, they put their rifles in front of them, touching their heads to the soil, as the Taliban do today. Before they left one evening to attack an Afghan army fort, Jalaladin held out a *Koran* and the men walked under it. It was God's word and would protect them.

Almost every conversation in Afghanistan, if it involves a plan for the future whether it is travel or dinner that night, ends with the words *in-shallah*, "God willing." A person's name often comes from the *Koran* or is related to Islam. Abdullah means "servant of God." Jalaladin means "greatness of faith." After a certain age, a man chooses his name.

If he can read and he buys a house, a man invites a mullah over, and he and members of his family will sit together and read, one by one, parts of the *Koran*, until they read the whole book. This is to bring prosperity to their home. In the countryside, almost every home has a *Koran* wrapped in a cloth sitting on a shelf.

If a man dies in battle, he becomes *shaheed*, in Pashto, the language of the Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. It is the same word in Dari, a dialect of Persian, and the language of the Tajiks, the second largest ethnic group of Afghanistan.

The word in Arabic for martyr is *shaheed*, meaning witness. Martyr comes from *martys* in Greek, meaning witness. A martyr is a witness for God. A Muslim *shaheed* goes directly to Heaven. He does not wait, as other Muslims must, for Judgment Day.

*"The unbelievers rejoice in this life: but brief indeed is the comfort of this life compared to the life to come."*¹

*"Allah has purchased of the faithful their lives and worldly goods and in return has promised them the Garden. They will fight for his cause, slay and be slain. Such is the true pledge that He has made them in the Torah, the Gospel and the Koran. And who is more true to this promise than Allah? Rejoice then in the bargain you have made. That is the supreme triumph."*²

¹ Ra'd/The Thunder 26 (The *Koran*).

² Al-Tawbah/Repentance 111 (The *Koran*).

There are cemeteries on the outskirts of villages, generally small with only a flat rock marking each grave; some have high, colorful flags, with inscriptions from the *Koran* on them, waving in the wind from the tops of wood poles.

Afghanistan is called the land of the high flags. These flags designate the graves of martyrs. A *shaheed* is revered in Afghanistan. Educated people in Kabul as well as illiterate farmers use the word *shaheed* when referring to someone who died in war.

Once at Shie-Khot a Soviet helicopter hovered above us, and we sat in our rooms waiting for it to attack. The man next to me stared up at the ceiling, shaking and sweating. Neither he nor anyone else in the room, it appeared, wanted to be a martyr. They wanted to live, like most men.

But many Muslims, as Saddiqui said, want to die and go to Heaven, where life is filled with joy and pleasure. Life is hard in Afghanistan, but Heaven and eternal happiness await the believer.

“Islam is deep in the Afghan soul,” said Balouch. “If people watch porno movies or drink alcohol which come from our neighbors who want to use these things against us, it is easy to mobilize the people against these things, which are against Islam.”

“We are religious because of the geographic position of Afghanistan, and because people live in small isolated villages. Religion is stronger in rural areas. Afghanistan has been attacked many times. It was always defended by religion and now that religion is Islam.”

Lord Curzon, the 19th century British viceroy in India, called Afghanistan the “cockpit of Asia.” British historian Arnold Toynbee called it “the roundabout of Asia.” The White Huns, Genghis Khan, the British, the Russians, the Americans, and others, all invaded here.

“Islam teaches people to defend themselves from invaders,” Balouch continued, referring to jihad as defensive war. “They have found that if they unite behind Islam, no one can defeat them. Kings have ruled without religion in Afghanistan, but as soon as someone wants to take anything away from religion, they have trouble.”

Zahir Shah³ and Daoud did not touch religion. Only when the USSR came and went against Islam, did the people revolt.⁴

³ King Zahir Shah, a Pashtun who only speaks Dari, ruled from 1933-73; Mohammed Sardar Daoud Khan, his first cousin and brother-in-law, overthrew him and established the first republic in July 1973.

⁴ “When the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) came to power in 1978, it tried to convince the people of their shared values and common concerns, as well as the fact that the government was the servant of the people, but the language used to convey these sentences was an alien one. It was derived

The Soviets had allies throughout the bureaucracy in Kabul, among the officer corps in the army, and in cities around the country, when men and women, frustrated by Afghanistan's feudal, isolated culture, thought communism, this worldly religion, was the answer. But in the countryside, the people rebelled.

"The Pakistanis lived for a long time under British rule and have lost their religious souls," said Balouch. "Central Asians lived for decades under Soviet rule. The Iranians are involved in politics. Afghanistan was never colonized. The Americans would lose if the people rose up against them. Over two million dead during the anti-Soviet jihad proves they will do it."

In the 1980s I walked one night with a group of men carrying a man who had been killed in battle back to his village. A man next to me cried. When they took the body into the man's house, the women began to wail. Every family who lost someone suffered, and still they fought.

I asked what was fundamentalism. "Look to the *Qur'an* and the Hadith," he said, as his two cell phones kept ringing, symbols of the new Afghanistan. The *Qur'an* on his desk represented eternal Afghanistan. "There are hundreds of verses that say that religion is neither fundamentalist nor extremist, but neither is it secular or too religious. One should neither eat too much nor use too much water when taking a shower."

"Fundamentalists are different from Muslims. Islam promotes, not killing."

A few days later I went to see Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai, former deputy leader of *Ettihad Islami* (Islamic Union), the party headed by Abdul Rabb Rasul Sayyaf, the Mujahideen leader once closest to Saudi Arabia and to Osama bin Laden. Sayyaf and those around him were certainly fundamentalists.

I told him about Haqqani holding a *Qur'an* in the air. "There is no precedent for that in the *Qur'an*," he said. "That is not Islam."

It didn't matter. The men believed that it would protect them. After they attacked a fort with mortars, shouting "*allah-o-akbar*" every time they dropped a shell into the barrel, the Afghan army shelled them back with artillery, but they laughed, even when a shell landed close to them, as they retreated into the night. God would protect them.

"The jihad against the Soviets was based upon faith, culture, and loyalty to Afghanistan," Ahmadzai said. "Afghans are Muslims. In the West they automatically

from a Marxist lexicon that had no roots in Afghan culture and that struck no resonant chord in the hearts and minds of the Afghan people." David B. Edwards, *Before Taliban*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, pp. 68-69.

list you as al-Qaeda. There is fanaticism in every religion. Muslims in Asia are equal to Christians in the U.S.”

We sit in his living room in the late afternoon, a heater, a plate of cookies, almonds, and raisins in front of us. We drank green tea as armed guards patrolled outside in the snow. “Others brought fundamentalism to Afghanistan,” he said.

Another afternoon I sat with an Afghan intellectual in his book-lined office. He recited an ancient Afghan song:

*“Oh, the beauty/when you are dancing/over the carpet/chasing the glass of wine.
Do you understand that over the carpet you are dancing/that in each knot my sorrows and joys
are woven? Just remember me too/I am also a woman like you/during weaving the carpet/my
backbone had pain/remember me I am also a woman like you.”*

I thought of the Afghanistan I knew in 1973 before the rise of modern Islamic fundamentalism. Then I read James Michener’s *Caravans* about Afghanistan and James Elroy Flecker’s poem, *The Golden Road to Samarqand*. “For the lust of knowing what should not be known, we took the golden road to Samarqand.” Today we read about al-Qaeda, war, and the Taliban.

“Faith must be first,” said Ahmadzai. “For Mullah Omar, faith comes first. The Taliban have lived in an isolated society. They have not associated with foreigners. Mullahs during Zahir Shah’s time did not associate with other Muslims in the world.”

Ahmadzai, a hydrologic engineer, studied at Colorado State University at Ft. Collins and at the University of Kansas. He was part of the Muslim Association of North America from 1973-75. There were 50,000-60,000 members.

“When I went to America, Americans were all very lovely people, but now it is different. Christians are trying to change Afghanistan. All the money being spent here will be wasted. Afghanistan is not a country to be imposed upon. People will react strongly.”

There are restaurants in Kabul that serve alcohol. Afghans aren’t allowed. There are thousands of foreigners, attached to embassies, companies, and nongovernment organizations (NGOs), making large salaries, living in Kabul. They are everywhere in the ministries, showing Afghans how to restructure their country.

“I am here for the money,” said one Englishwoman, as she sat at a bar, eating a steak dinner with friends and drinking Australian wine. Foreigners do not walk down the streets in Kabul, but rush by in their 4x4s with the windows rolled up, wary of the people they have come to help.

“The Taliban are Muslims first, whether they are from Kandahar or Helmand,” said Ahmadzai. “They are serious. Over 95% of them are poor men. Rich men do not fight. They like their wealth too much. Americans do not understand the politics of this country: the war between the communists and the mujahideen still exists.”

I would learn how the U.S. Army is caught in the middle of this.

I noticed as I talked with Afghans, who seemed to be involved in fighting the Americans, that there was a pride in them, something that made them determined and strong. They were on a mission, this time it was against the Americans.

“Osama’s faith is first in his life,” said Ahmadzai. “That is why he is so popular. Wahhabis are good people. They are sincere. The Taliban cannot be bribed. If you become an enemy in Afghanistan, we follow our satanic impulses.”

“The U.S. has committed a thousand mistakes, and it has never apologized. U.S. military tactics have made people angry. They are powerful, and we are not. A suicide bomber does not care. During 14 years of jihad, there was no suicide.”

Neither were there suicide bombers when the Taliban fought the Northern Alliance. There were 25 suicide bombings in 2005, 137 in 2006. These numbers will increase as more young men are brainwashed. Suicide bombers are called *khud-kush* in Dari and *zan margay* in Pashto. They are martyrs and will go directly to Paradise.

Some fundamentalists, who want long lives for themselves, use their most pious young men to fight in this way for them. “*If America possesses advanced weapons of mass destruction and well-equipped armies, then it should know that we possess what they cannot. The love of death in the path of Allah,*” said Ayman al-Zawahiri.⁵

I was north of Peshawar in January 2006, when missiles from a U.S. drone hit a *hujra*, or village guesthouse, at Damadola, in Bajour Agency, Pakistan, an area where Saudi Arabian Wahhabi missionaries have worked. There was intelligence that Zawahiri was going to be there. He wasn’t.

About 15 children were killed. Their names and ages were published in Pakistani papers. U.S. politicians and administrative officials said they would do it again in order to kill al-Qaeda. There was another attack, on a madrasah, in October. The names and ages of the victims were published in the papers. People in Peshawar felt that the U.S. and Musharraf were at war with Islam and the Pashtuns.

⁵ See *azzam.com*, Azzam Publications, September 2002.

In December 2001, in Kabul I met Marla Ruzicka, a young American who had come to help the victims of war. A group of us had dinner one night. A Marine Corps captain, working with the media, said quietly to me, "This is war. The U.S. does not apologize."

What he did not realize was that U.S. bombings of civilians, kicking down village doors, breaking the most sacred taboo in Afghanistan, the sanctity of a man's home, ransacking it, frisking women, putting hoods over men and taking them away in handcuffs, humiliating them, destroying their pride, all for being Taliban suspects; for believing as they have always believed, and their fathers before them, only created enemies.

In the 1980s, someone in almost every village in Afghanistan had a battery-powered radio. Men would listen to the daily news reports from the BBC and VOA. They knew about Soviet tactics, just as today they know about U.S. and NATO tactics. They know about U.S. prisons in Afghanistan, they hear stories of men being tortured. They listen to the radio.

"There is no difference to an Afghan in the countryside between a U.S. soldier or NATO soldier and one from the Soviet Union," said Balouch.

"Al-Qaeda and the Taliban are the same," said Ahamdzai. "The target is the same – the revival of Islam. The goals are different: Taliban are concerned about Afghanistan and al-Qaeda's goals are worldwide. The Americans are the enemy."

In the 1980s in the mountains, I asked a commander, with a long, thick black beard and a stern manner, what he would do if he found that two people had committed adultery. "We would stone them to death," he said. I cringed. They killed a sheep in my honor and that night, at dinner, he made sure that I had the best portion of meat.

I was a guest with Pashtuns, who lived then as they do today, especially along the Pakistani border, by their ancient code of Pashtunwali. I know Pashtuns who live in North America, who've told me they follow Pashtunwali.

One requirement is to protect to the death a guest in your home, no matter who he is. This form of sanctuary is *panah*. Omar cited this when he refused to give up bin Laden after 9/11. There is *Badel*, blood revenge, and *milmastia*, the Pashtun's famed hospitality.

"Some of Pashtunwali are against Islam," said Ahmadzai. "One is allowed to kill in Pashtunwali. Islam should come first. If I went to Pashtunwali and (former president Burhanuddin) Rabbani went to his Tajiks and (Uzbek warlord Rashid) Dostum went to the Uzbeks, then I could not be friends with them. Islam is what unites this country. If we go back to tribalism, then Afghanistan will disintegrate."

In March 2002, the U.S. Army, led by the 10th Mountain Division, launched Operation Anaconda, its largest ground offensive since Viet Nam, at Shie-Khot. I watched from a distance as U.S. planes bombed al-Qaeda and Taliban positions. The men there now were fighting another jihad against another invader.

There were differences between the 1980s and after 9/11, the most important of which is that al-Qaeda was there with the Taliban. There were reports that the foreigners fought fiercely without regard for their own lives.

When I was at Shie-Khot, one day an Egyptian army officer appeared. He stayed with me. We argued for hours, a small fire in the room to keep us warm. He was happy that Egyptian President Anwar Sadat had been killed.

He was, I know now, a member of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, whose men killed Sadat. He had come to Afghanistan, as thousands of other idealistic young men would come in the future from around the world, looking for a cause greater than them, something to believe in, to live and fight for, and for which to die.

The Egyptian was heavy-set and when he left, two Afghan boys snickered as they helped him onto a small donkey that would take him back to Pakistan. We were both outsiders, except that he was a Muslim, and he wanted to create a pure Islamic state in Egypt.

He was one of the first "Arab-Afghans," in Afghanistan. They were the foundation of al-Qaeda. I asked retired Pakistani Major General Nasirullah Babar, who helped create the mujahideen and later worked with the Taliban, how many came.

"About 5,000 Arab-Afghans came to Pakistan in the 1980s," he said. "By the late 1990s 40,000 had come." Lieutenant General Hamed Gul, head of the Inter-service Intelligence Directorate (ISI), said "54,000, from 38 countries."

According to the 9/11 Commission, from 1996 to 9/11, 10,000-20,000 foreign fighters came to Afghanistan and trained in camps run by al-Qaeda. It is hard to know the truth.

"*They will fight to the last Afghan,*" American officials said in the 1980s. In 1984, President Reagan and others⁶ called the mujahideen "freedom fighters" and compared them to America's "founding fathers." I sat in the East Room of the White House and watched him say this as the cameras rolled. They were our allies.

They, with assistance, defeated the Red Army. Thousands of young Arab-Afghans, filled with confidence, energy, the joy of brotherhood, and the belief that God was on

⁶ Meeting with former Secretary of State William Rogers at Rogers & Wells, New York, March 1984.

their side, now wanted to wage jihad against their own corrupt un-Islamic governments. They became the vanguard of al-Qaeda.

Many stayed in Afghanistan. They fought in the front lines of the Taliban against the Northern Alliance. Olivier Tirard-Collet, a Frenchman, worked in Afghanistan for the U.N. in the 1990s. "Osama bin Laden and the rest of al-Qaeda were guests here," he said over dinner in Kabul. "They couldn't speak Dari or Pashto. The Arabs behaved cruelly towards the Afghans. The Taliban and the Northern Alliance would shout at one another at night across the front lines, but the Arabs fought hard. They were bloodthirsty."

"We would watch the Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri caravans, with their smoked windows, moving around Kabul. Bin Laden acted like a king, like the U.S. ambassador today."

The Taliban were not then at war with the West. Neither was the West at war with them. The Taliban welcomed the U.N. to Afghanistan and curbed opium production when the U.N. asked them to. Taliban leaders visited the U.S.⁷

"If I had other men with me, I would have arrested him," said Mansoor, talking of Mullah Tarah. He looked, with his black beard and black turban, like Tarah. He became nervous after he saw the Taliban leader. He was working for the Americans.

Mir Saib Khan, in his 40s, another guide, wore a *paktool*, a round felt hat, a bandoleer of bullets across his chest, and carried a pistol and a Kalashnikov. "I worked for the Americans for two years," said Khan. "Someone threw a grenade into our house a few months ago because of this. I have to live in Khost now. Over 80% of the people in this area hate the Americans; 20% support them."

Khan fought for ten years against the Soviet Union. Until recently, he was an AMF or "campaign soldier" for the U.S. AMF stands for Afghan Military Force, men trained by the CIA., or a contractor. One former AMF soldier showed me a card issued to him by Blackwater after completing a three-day rifle course. The card said he was a "warrior."

AMF personnel serve as interpreters, guides, guards, and soldiers for the U.S.

"Ever since I started working with the Americans, I have had trouble sleeping," said Mansoor. "I am scared. I have armed guards at my house."

Khan and Mansoor kept looking around as we talked. They were afraid of the Taliban. We had seen other men performing their ablutions at a stream: washing up to their

⁷ Ahmed Rashid, "*The Taliban*," New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.

elbows; washing their faces, necks, behind their ears, and above their ankles; they were pious men, cleaning themselves before prayer.

Since late 2001, some members of the Taliban and al-Qaeda fleeing Afghanistan have sought refuge in Pakistan, mainly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA); the seven districts, called agencies, totaling 27, 200 kilometers with a population of four million, in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), just across the border.

To understand them and Islamic fundamentalism, it is necessary to know the geography and history of Afghanistan.

HISTORY

Afghanistan is a land of high, rugged snow-covered mountains, rolling, sandy deserts, and wide open plains. It is 250,000 square miles, about the size of Texas, larger than France. Two-thirds of the country lies above 5,000 feet. It is land-locked. There is no railroad. The Hindu-Kush Mountains, north of Kabul, separate Central Asia from South Asia.

There is little rainfall, water is scarce—there have been years of drought recently—and the land is barren. Only a fraction of the land is cultivable. The people are proud, tough, and generous, comprising as many as 20 ethnic groups, speaking 30 languages.

The history of the name “Afghan” is disputed. Babur, the great Mughal emperor from Samarqand, writing in the 16th century about Pashtun tribes, refers to them as Afghans, not Pashtuns.

Some scholars feel that the Pashtuns are the Paktua tribes referred to in the Vedas, ancient writings of the Aryan invaders of India over 6,000 years ago. Herodotus refers to the Paktues of northern India. Other historians feel that the Pashtuns are descended from the Ephthalite Huns, or White Huns, Central Asian nomads of the 5th and 6th centuries, who lived north of the Great Wall.⁸

The Muslim Arabs reached what is today Afghanistan in about 650 A.D. when they occupied Herat and Balkh. But it wasn't until Mahmud began his rule in 998 that Sunni Islam became the religion of Afghanistan.

The two main Pashtun tribes are the Durrani, once called the Abdalis, who live between Kandahar and Herat; and the Ghilzai, who live between Kandahar and Ghazni. Both have been traditional enemies.

⁸ Martin Evans, *Afghanistan, A New History*, Richmond, United Kingdom: Curzon Press, 2001. See also *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2007.

In the 19th century, Russia and Great Britain fought diplomatically for control of Asia. As Britain moved up from India and as Russia moved down into Central Asia, and, to Great Britain's fear, into Persia, only Afghanistan separated them. It became the buffer state.

They came to an agreement over Afghanistan in the Treaty of St. Petersburg, August 31, 1907. They drew its borders to include the Wakhan corridor, the panhandle that stretches up to China, so that no part of the British Empire would touch the Russian Empire.

Great Britain fought two wars in Afghanistan: 1839-42 and 1879-80 and maintained control of its foreign affairs until the end of its third war in 1919 when, in the Treaty of Rawalpindi, August 19, it relinquished control, and modern Afghanistan was born. Afghanistan Independence Day is August 19.

Today's troubles began with the Afghan-Indian border.

In 1893, Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, foreign secretary to the government of British India, induced Abdur Rahman Khan, emir of Afghanistan, to accept what became known as the Durand Line, 2,430 kilometers long, as the border between Afghanistan and India. The British drew this line to assure a buffer state and to divide the Pashtuns.

Afghanistan had been weakened already by the two Anglo-Afghan wars and forced to accept two treaties with the British which took away the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan. The final insult was the Durand Line.

This border, which has never been demarcated, cut through the middle of the Pashtun nation; this beloved Pashtunistan, or Pukhtunkhwa, of which Ahmed Shah Durrani, born in Multan in present day Pakistan and the founder of the Afghan nation in 1747 in Kandahar, used to sing; this nation of proud men, who worship the *Qur'an*, honor, dignity, war, and the gun, and who once ruled all the way to Delhi.

The Pashtuns have lived here for 5,000 years. The vast majority today consider the border of Afghanistan to be the Indus River, the life's blood of Pakistan, which is the *eastern* border of the NWFP, 60 miles inside Pakistan.

The 1893 agreement was to remain in force for 100 years, but no legislative body in Afghanistan, including the current Wolesi Jirga, has ever ratified it.

When Pakistan was established in August 1947, Afghanistan, because of the Durand Line and its support for Pashtunistan (today's NWFP and Baluchistan, which would

give it access to the sea), was the only nation to vote against Pakistan's entry into the United Nations.

There has never been a census, but CIA estimates are that there are about 30 million people in Afghanistan. The Pashtuns comprise about 40% of the country. There are about 12 million Pashtuns in Afghanistan, but over 30 million Pashtuns in Pakistan, a nation of 160 million. Pakistan is wary of Pashtun nationalism and uses Islam to divide it.

The Taliban are Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in the NWFP, one-half the populations of Baluchistan and most of southern Afghanistan.

In 1981, when I traveled from Peshawar, the capital of the NWFP across into FATA and up into the foothills approaching Afghanistan, there was very little indication of government control; nor did I see any modern weaponry. I sat one day in a baked mud house, waiting for night to fall, before we could continue on.

The house was filled with pine boxes of ammunition, the beginnings of the billions of dollars of arms provided by the CIA to Pakistan, which would route it through the ISI (not as famous then as it is today), to the mujahideen, and to the Afghan political parties which controlled them in Peshawar.

It became the largest covert CIA operation in history. Saudi Arabia matched every dollar the U.S. spent. Pakistan gave the most arms to Gulbadeen Hekmatyier's Hezb-i-Islami (Islamic Party), considered the most fundamentalist, the most radical of the Mujahideen political parties.

I first met Hekmatyier in October 1981 at his compound in Peshawar. His aides called him "Brother Hekmatyier" and spoke softly. I felt like I was in a monastery. "We will win because we have God," Hekmatyier said.

During the 1979-89 Afghan-Soviet war, over three million Afghans became refugees in Pakistan, mostly in the NWFP. Thousands of young men grew up in these camps. Families sent their sons to Deobandi madrasahs along the border. They were free, provided room, board, and an Islamic education. Students learned about militant jihad.

Their fathers were fighting a defensive war of survival; they were trying to hold onto the only way of life that they and their ancestors had ever known, the history, glory, and poetry of which had been passed down from father to son for generations.

USAID, under a program at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, supplied the textbooks to secular refugee camp schools. These books featured drawings of guns, bullets,

soldiers, and mines, “where students learned basic math by counting dead Russians and Kalashnikov rifles.”⁹

The Taliban government in Afghanistan used these same books. The U.S. helped nurture the young minds of those who became the Taliban.

The Afghan-Soviet war ended February 15, 1989, but with a communist government in power. Millions of Afghans were dead and wounded, yet the communists, backed by the USSR, and the Mujahideen, backed by Pakistan, continued to fight.

Pakistan’s goal was and still is to create “strategic depth” in Afghanistan to keep from being surrounded there by India; and using the Pashtuns and Islamic fundamentalism to rally them, to control Afghanistan, and establish ties and trade with Sunni Central Asia.

So much, if not everything in Pakistan, goes back to India.

“We are worried about the Indian consulates in Jalalabad and its new consulate in Kandahar,” said Jehangir Karamat, former chief of staff of the Pakistani army, and later Pakistani ambassador to the U.S.,¹⁰ at the U.S. Army War College. There is an Indian consulate in Zahidan on the Iranian-Afghan border.

In 1971, civil war broke out between East Pakistan, backed by India and West Pakistan, which gave birth to Bangladesh. Pakistan lost over half its population. In 1974 India exploded a nuclear device. India has trained rebels from Baluchistan in India. India gives substantial foreign aid to Kabul. Its businessmen are there.

Pakistan, using Islamic fundamentalists fights in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and elsewhere surrounding India.

ISLAM

The Arabs brought Islam to Afghanistan in 642 A.D. “Islam did not come to us under the sword, but through missionaries and preachers,” said Balouch. The strong Sunni Ghaznavid dynasty (962-1187) assured that Sunni Islam, and not Shia Islam from Iran, would dominate Afghanistan and the rest of South Asia.

Night comes quickly in the winter in Afghanistan. The streets of Kabul are dark and covered with snow and ice. Policemen, wearing earmuffs and holding Kalashnikovs,

⁹ “ABC’s of Jihad in Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, March 23, 2002.

¹⁰ Talk given April 2005.

stop each car, talk to each driver, look inside holding a flashlight, and then wave the cars on.

It was five years after the U.S. invasion when the U.S. thought that it had quickly defeated the Taliban. There is an old Afghan saying: "It is easy to enter Afghanistan, but very hard to leave."

I went to see Mohammed Eshaq, a former close associate of the famous and charismatic Ahmed Shah Massoud, editor of *Payan-e-Mujahed Weekly, Message of the Mujahideen*, a paper for those who fought the USSR and who are angry at being pushed aside in the new, modern western Karzai government.

Eshaq's office was in the back of a small concrete house at the end of a narrow muddy street. Muddy shoes and sandals were by the door. There was an old sofa, books and papers scattered on the floor, and a bokhari, the small round wood burning stove that is in every home and tea house in Afghanistan, in the center of the room. A light bulb hung from the ceiling.

Eshaq, wearing headphones, sat behind a computer. "First of all, there are no ideological discussions on Islam in Afghanistan. Islam is intertwined with family and tribal codes," said Mohammed Eshaq, a Tajik.

There are about 18,000 villages in Afghanistan, few of which have electricity or running water. Over 85% of the population lives in small, isolated, baked mud enclaves in the mountains and deserts, in a land where nomads travel by camel caravan, and families still live in caves, where men pray five times a day by rushing streams, under trees, in their homes, shops, mosques, or in the desert.

Whether you lean on cushions in a carpeted guest room, or *mehman khanna*, with Tajiks in Kabul, or in a *hujra* in a Pashtun village, no matter if your hosts are 25 or 65, they will hold up their hands, palms up, before their meal, and say, *Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim*, "In the name of God, the most kind and merciful," as they will when they are finished, thanking God for their food.

Good-bye in Pashto is *hoday-pahmahn*, "Go with God."

In Kabul I met a famous female activist, poet, and politician, La Pasionaria¹¹ of Afghanistan of the 1980s, Gatria Yazdanparast. We talked in a small hotel restaurant as a film crew from a Pashto television channel in Islamabad prepared to interview her. From her, I would get a woman's view of Islamic fundamentalism.

¹¹ Dolores Iarruri, aka La Pasionaria, was a famous journalist and left-wing activist who fought passionately against General Franco in the Spanish Civil War.

“I was a mujahid—a member of Jamiat-i-Islami,” she said. “I was the youngest professor of law at Kabul University. I was 21. I worked with the mujahideen.”

Jamiat-i-Islami, headed by former Afghan president Burhaddein Rabbani, was one of the main fundamentalist parties of the Afghan jihad.

“We, the student wing of Jamiat, owned the Kabul University Student Union,” she said, laughing. “I was famous for my patriotic poetry.” Girls in refugee camps used to sing her songs in school every day.

“I am still a mujahid. I was fighting against injustice then and do now. I don’t care what the West thinks. To me, to be a mujahid is to fight against injustice. I believe in religious pluralism. Islam should be used for political unification, not separation. We should understand Islam in modern times. It was a different age 500 years ago.”

The men around us stopped what they were doing. “She speaks in such beautiful, high level Persian that it is intimidating,” said my translator. “We just want to listen to her.”

She smiled modestly, but did not lower her gaze. “What does jihad mean to you?”

“The West should change its views of what it thinks jihad means. Jihad is real good for humans. The West wants to show that Islam is a religion of killing, not peace. If a Muslim does something wrong, that does not make Islam wrong. If Christians do something wrong, we don’t blame Christianity.”

“The West is leading us towards a religious war. Pope Benedict said that Islam is a religion of war. The previous Pope was tolerant. He forgave the man who tried to kill him.”

Jihad means correct yourself. Teach yourself to respect others, to still your unalloyed ambitions. When you accept this in yourself, you can fight against injustice.

She wore a ring on her thumb, a sports jacket, a long black dress, and a scarf over her head. Now mainly poor women beggars dress in chadori, what foreigners call the burqa, an Urdu word. “Women have no problem in Islam. The Prophet gave equal status to women. I am from Kabul, not the countryside. It is different for a woman there. They think they are second class. Islam does not limit us, only our traditions.”

She was like Hameeda Nayeem in Kashmir, the same energy, the same drive.

“When the Russians came, it was an injustice: I wrote articles and poetry. I fought a cultural jihad. When the mujahideen took over, I worked in women’s activities. I

spotted needy people and told NGOs to help them. I distributed food during the civil war. I told jihadi leaders to quit fighting because women were losing their families.”

Then the Taliban came. They threatened her, and she went to the Netherlands and returned when they fell.

“I have to be hopeful, but I am afraid for the future,” she said. “The Taliban are fighting for power, not for Islam.”

They are fighting for both, what they call a defensive war against the West. They have lost the idealism of the early Taliban, their honesty, their piousness, and now behead those they disagree with.

I asked her, a Tajik, about her family. “My husband is Pashtun and the best man in the world. His family came and asked if I would marry him. I was 17. He was handsome and nice—beautiful inside and outside. I love my Pashtun family. I have three children, two sons and a really beautiful girl. I rent my house. I have no money. I haven’t changed.”

And fundamentalism? She sipped a glass of green tea. “I believe in the fundamentals of Islam. Fundamentalists don’t know the fundamentals. They are extremists. I grew up in the city. I am tolerant.”

We shook hands. She looked at the digital photographs I took of her. The television crew was waiting.

“Have you ever been afraid?”

She raised her head high, her eyes shining.

“No,” she said. “Never.”

THE HISTORY OF THE MUJIHADEEN

In July 1973, former Prime Minister Mohammed Sardar Daoud Khan, called the “red prince” for his leftist leanings, brother-in-law and first cousin to King Zahir Shah, overthrew the king and established a republic ending over 200 years of monarchy in one of the most feudal countries on earth.

In September 1973, I drove a Volkswagen with my younger brother from Germany to Pakistan. We reached the Iranian-Afghan border and the paved road ended. There were two small wood shacks where we got our passports stamped and visas.

We drove on a gravel road, and then we approached Herat and a welcome paved road began again. We followed this road, built by the Soviet Union in the 1960s, from Herat south to Kandahar. It does not curve as easily as an American road, but it still exists. It is Pakistan's main road link to Central Asia and the road the Taliban took at the beginning of their march north.

At Kandahar, an oasis town founded by Alexander the Great, we took another paved road built by the U.S. north up to Kabul. When we came down through a mountain pass and saw it in the distance, it was like Shangri-La.

The road was safe and empty. In 2002, it was mostly a bumpy dusty track. It took a day and a half to travel between Kabul and Kandahar. I drove from Kabul southeast on the Jalalabad Road through the Khyber Pass down to Peshawar, Pakistan, and it was like going on a Sunday drive.

There was no railroad, no television, and no telephone for common people to the outside world. Kabul, the capital and commercial center, was a quiet, graceful city of 350,000. There were few cars, Russian movies, and long camel caravans moved slowly through the streets. At night, the police, wearing turbans, rode horses and had rifles on their backs.

There were about 5,000 hippies in Kabul then, living in hotels and houses, many in Shar-e-Now, in the center of the city, lying outside in the sun during the day, smoking hashish and listening to music. At prayer times, the muezzin's haunting call was mixed with the sound of the Rolling Stones and the Jefferson Airplane.

What foreigners did not know, as the thousands of foreigners in Kabul do not seem to understand today, is that a great many Afghans, poor and deeply Muslim, had to then and must today work hard every day to survive, and while happy for the money they brought to spend, sometimes resented these decadent, rich, foreigners.

Louis Dupree, the most prominent American Afghan anthropologist of the 20th century, said in his book, *Afghanistan*, that it was the hippies who began to first smuggle drugs to Europe and the U.S., beginning the drug business which plagues Afghanistan today.

No one I met in 1973 seemed concerned about the coup, which would lead, 28 years later, indirectly to 9/11.

"Kabul University in the 1970s was a hotbed of political activism," said Eshaq. "The Constitution of 1964 allowed for political parties. The bureaucracy was corrupt and old-minded. It did not know the arguments that the students were making."

The Soviet-leaning People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan was on one side, and Islamic parties were on the other. "This battle continues, largely unnoticed by the international community, today," said Eshaq. "The public did not understand the anti-Islamic groups. There is a real division between intellectuals and the common people."

In Khost I met with Mohammed Rafar, a businessman. Until recently he was commander of all AMF personnel in Khost. He showed me citations from the U.S., pictures of him with U.S. officials, and as a leader before his men. "I commanded 2,000 men," he said.

"I quit, as have a lot of soldiers, because the Americans are hiring former Afghan Army officers. They are communists who fought the mujahideen. They flatter the Americans, but hate them. The Americans don't realize it."

Rafar, Mir, and other former AMF personnel called them *choploose*, which means a sycophant, a flatterer, like a servant. "They tell the Americans what they want to hear." Rafar said the U.S. preferred the Afghan army officers because they were flexible and better educated.

"There are two types of Afghans," said Mohammed Nubis, a former AMF soldier who also quit working for the Americans, "communists and mujahideen. Mujahideen people are faithful and remember the U.S. help during jihad. Communists are communists."

J. N. Dixit, Indian ambassador to Afghanistan during the 1980s,¹² said there were secular Afghans who were comfortable drinking vodka with the Soviets while the mujahideen fought in the mountains, as today there are alcohol-drinking technocrats working for the Karzai government while the Taliban fight in the mountains.

"Activists founded the Muslim Youth Organization (Sazman-i-Jawanan-i Musulman) at Kabul University," said Eshaq. "It was headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Tajik and a professor at the Faculty of Islamic Law."

In the 1960s, Rabbani and other professors went to al-Ahzar University in Cairo, where they read the works of Sayyid Qutb, the main theorist of the Muslim Brotherhood. Some brought Qutb's books back to Afghanistan.

"We weren't thinking of fighting in 1973," said Karzai, sitting in his home in the upscale Wazir Akbar Khan section of Kabul. "I sent messages to Daoud. If you free yourself from the communists we will accept you. The communists had power, and we realized we had to flee."

¹² J. N. Dixit, *An Afghan Diary*, New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2000.

In 1973 about 12 young activists led by Hekmatyier and Ahmed Shah Masood fled to Peshawar. Daoud had reasserted Afghanistan's claims to Pashtunistan, and the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto backed his enemies, the young fundamentalists.

Major General Nasarullah Babar, a Pashtun who was then governor of the NWFP, took them in. "I had a code word for each person: one was the plumber, another the electrician. I put them all in the army. We realized that we needed a political leader, and so we brought over Rabbani."¹³

"We established a *shura* (advisory council) in Peshawar," said Rabbani. "It was outside the country, but no one influenced us. We realized that the USSR was going to invade, especially after the April 1978 coup."¹⁴

They used the young militant fundamentalists as Hekmatyier, Massoud and others used Pakistan. It is the same today. "We don't like the Pakistanis, but we need them," said a Taliban fighter I met in a refugee camp in Peshawar in December 2006.

In July 1975, the mujahideen, or holy warriors, as they now called themselves, attacked government installations in the Panjshir Valley, Massoud's home, northeast of Kabul. "The government killed or captured most of them," said Babar. But the young men were committed.

I met many of them six years later. For the Americans, the war was just starting, but not for them. By 1984 the mujahideen, under Pakistani tutelage, had formed a seven-party government based in Peshawar. In 1985, the U.S. and Pakistan brought leaders of this government to the U.S. to present its credentials to the U.N. and to meet with President Reagan.

A few months before Zalmay Khalilzad,¹⁵ a consultant on Afghanistan to the State Department, asked if I would help start an organization called Friends of Afghanistan (FOA) to help the Afghans. I said yes. FOA was overseen by the National Security Council and the State Department. Khalilzad began to travel to Saudi Arabia.

In 1985, Pakistan and the U.S. brought the mujahideen government to New York. Gulbadeen Hekmatyier was the current president. I went with him to the U.N. where he tried to present the government's credentials. He gave a speech to a crowd of Afghan demonstrators. That evening I was with him in his hotel room when a call came from the State Department.

¹³ Author interview, Peshawar, May 2003.

¹⁴ Author interview, Kabul, December 2006.

¹⁵ Current U.S. ambassador to Iraq; ambassador designate to the U.N.

“Tell Mr. Hekmatyier that it’s confirmed that he and other members of the government will meet with President Reagan in the Oval Office,” said the caller. He gave a date and time. I told Hekmatyier. “I can’t do that,” he said softly. I told the State Department official. He screamed at me on the phone. “Who does he think he is?”

Hekmatyier knew well who he was, a man on a mission with God on his side. He, a guest, had said “no” to the most powerful man on earth. In 1992, he became Prime Minister of Afghanistan, but considered the new mujahideen government to be “un-Islamic,” quit, and sent thousands of rockets into Kabul, killing thousands of his own countrymen.

In 1992, the mujahideen, after waging war for 17 years, defeated the Soviet Union and formed a government under Rabbani. But they kept fighting one another. Never in the history of the world had so much money, and so much weaponry, been poured into one of the poorest countries on earth. Poor men had grown wealthy and corrupt.

Another group of young men, this time called the Taliban, would have to rise to cleanse the country of corruption and create, finally, a true Islamic government. *Talib* in Arabic means student. It has come to mean religious student, one who is studying at or who has attended or even graduated from a madrasah.

The plural is Taliban. Madrasah means “place of learning” or school in Arabic. The plural is madaris, or madrasahs in English. It has come to mean religious school. One who graduates is called a Maulavi, or a maulena.

There are different stories on how the Taliban began. One is that in 1994, Mohammed Omar, a former mujahid, was angry that a local militia, of which there were then hundreds throughout Afghanistan, had set up a roadblock near his village, forcing travelers to pay a fee.

He gathered a group of men and a few rifles and drove the militia away. They opened more roadblocks, and a movement began.

Another story is that a warlord from Kandahar abducted two girls and kept them at his base where he and his men raped them repeatedly. Omar heard of this, gathered some mujahideen, freed the girls, and hanged the warlord from a tank barrel.

A U.S. State Department cable¹⁶ states that in late 1994, the Taliban, now 200 strong, captured the border town of Spin Boldak and an arms cache that belonged to Hekmatyier. The Taliban said the commander there was not a good Muslim. They had

¹⁶ “Finally, a talkative Taliban; origins and membership of the Religious Students’ Movement,” U.S. Embassy Cable: 1995ISLMA01792, February 20, 1995, National Security Archives.

artillery support from Pakistan. A convoy of 30 Pakistani trucks, led by Nasarullah Babar, now Interior Minister under Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, arrived at the border.

The Taliban held the convoy there for several days. The Pakistanis convinced them that it was their “Islamic duty to assist their Muslim brothers in Central Asia,”¹⁷ the convoy’s destination. Pakistan wanted to open trade ties with Central Asia. The convoy, with Taliban escorts, went north, cutting the chains of roadblocks, ending the revenue stream of local militias heading for Turkmenistan.

The Taliban, noted for their honesty and piousness and led by Mullah Omar, would bring peace and harmony, under God, to Afghanistan.

J. N. Dixit said that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, disillusioned with the infighting in the Rabbani government and upset that it was acting independently of Pakistan, created the Taliban.

“We don’t know when Pakistan took over the Taliban,” said Eshaq.

The State Department cable indicates that it was an indigenous movement—I believe this—and that the Taliban wanted to remain free of Pakistan. In September 1996, the Taliban, backed by Pakistan, captured Kabul. By 1998, they, with religious fervor and cohesion in their ranks, controlled 29 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces.

When the Taliban came to power, Hekmatyier fled to Iran. He fights the U.S. today. He has been fighting for over 30 years. He is not part of the Taliban. He is a political not a religious leader and has never been accepted by them. He did not attend a madrasah.

Thousands of “Arab Afghans” fought in the frontlines against the non-Pashtun Northern Alliance. They created al-Qaeda, worked with the ISI who needed fighters for Afghanistan and Kashmir, and ran training camps in Afghanistan.

After the Taliban government fell in 2001, “the first-ever Afghan government that Islamabad could regard as friendly,”¹⁸ the Pakistani army, under pressure from the U.S., moved in force for the first time in its history, up along the Durand Line to stop al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants from crossing into Pakistan.

For four years its army was at war in the NWFP with Pashtun tribes, Taliban, and al-Qaeda. It lost over 600 men and says it captured hundreds of al-Qaeda figures.¹⁹ There

¹⁷ Ahmed Rashid, *The Taliban*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

¹⁸ Stephen P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 215.

¹⁹ Comments by General Musharraf in *The News*, a Pakistani newspaper, January 27, 2007.

are now reports, as I write this in March 2007, confirmed by the U.S., that it has begun to build a wall, with U.S. backing, along the border.

On April 4, 2004, the Pakistani army signed a peace agreement at Shakai, South Waziristan, with Nek Mohammed, 26, the long-haired fiery leader of the Pashtun resistance. He reneged on the agreement, and the U.S. killed him with a *predator* drone missile on June 17.

The Pakistani army, in particular its officer corps, observers feel, is mostly Punjabi, meaning from Punjab Province, the most populated province and ethnic group in Pakistan,²⁰ but this is not the case.²¹ There are Pashtuns in the army. They were fighting their brothers and cousins, many of whom were close to the Taliban.

Pashtuns in the NWFP like to refer to the Pakistani army as the “Punjabi army,” and the ISI as a Punjabi intelligence service.

“The Waziristan deal was to prevent dissension within the Pakistani army. Border guards are dying and defecting. The deal was to satisfy the army.”²²

On February 5, 2005, the army signed a peace agreement with Baitullah Mehsud, head of the Mehsud tribe, on behalf of the Taliban *shura*, which agreed to stop crossing the border into Afghanistan, attacking government buildings and security forces.

The agreement was brokered by Maulana Fazlur Rahman, leader of the opposition in Pakistan’s National Assembly. He is head of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Islamic Party of Religious Leaders), the largest party in the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) (United Action Council), an alliance of six political-religious parties that came together and to power in a democratic vote in the NWFP, after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan.

The MMA, which campaigned on a promise to introduce *sharia*, or Islamic law, and to rid the country of U.S. forces, now controls the provincial assembly in the NWFP and is General Perez Musharraf’s coalition partner in the Baluchistan provincial assembly.

I met with Abdullah, a tribal chief from Wana, South Waziristan. “The Taliban have introduced their version of *sharia* into our area,” he said. “Our women are not allowed to carry water or cut wood, like before. They can no longer go on the main roads. They cannot wear white shawls, because the Taliban said they were too appealing.”

²⁰ Punjab means “five waters, or rivers,” in Punjabi; punj means five, “ab” means water; the five rivers supply the water needed to grow the wheat in what is Pakistan’s breadbasket.

²¹ Stephen Cohen, *The Pakistani Army*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 113.

²² Center for Conflict and Peace Studies, Kabul, October 14, 2006.

Abdullah's brother, who works for the government, has been threatened because of this and forced to leave Waziristan. Taliban forces have killed numerous tribal leaders.

"After six p.m., everyone must stay at home unless there is an emergency,"²³ said Abdullah. The Taliban are responsible for security. The Pakistani army is in their camps. Government agencies have agreed to follow the Taliban's rules. They call our area 'The Islamic Emirate of Waziristan'."

On September 9, 2006, the government of Pakistan signed a peace agreement with tribal leaders in North Waziristan. The army agreed to cede control to the tribes and the Taliban if tribal leaders agreed not to attack the army.

According to U.S. and NATO commanders, cross-border attacks from Pakistan have increased 200 percent since Pakistan signed these two agreements. "The enemy does use . . . the inside of Pakistan for command and control," said Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, in charge of U.S. forces in Afghanistan.²⁴

"I take extremely strong exception to anybody blaming Pakistan so blatantly suggesting the intelligence agency or any government agency is cooperating with these extremist forces and sending them to Afghanistan," said Musharraf. "This is preposterous."²⁵

"The new Pakistani dictator has played the West like a fiddle," said Benazir Bhutto, "dispensing occasional support in the war on terror to keep America and Britain off his back . . . His regime, claiming sections of the frontier are ungovernable, has relinquished responsibility to the Taliban and al-Qaeda. During both of my tenures as prime minister, my government enforced the writ of the state there through the civil administration and paramilitary troops."²⁶

Yet it was her father's government that backed the fundamentalists against Daoud, and her interior minister, Nasarullah Babar, who rode with the Taliban into Kabul in 1996. Every Pakistani government tries to control Afghanistan, as it wants to control Kashmir, and uses militant Islamic fundamentalists to further its foreign policy.

THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN

Pak means pure in Urdu, the language of the Mughal Empire, the official language of Pakistan and unofficial language of Muslim India. Stan means land. Pakistan is the Land of the Pure, the religious pure. It was founded August 1947 as the world's first

²³ Author interview, Peshawar, Pakistan, December 2006.

²⁴ *Reuters*, January 16, 2007.

²⁵ *Dawn*, January 24, 2007.

²⁶ *The Guardian*, August 23, 2006.

Muslim state, a home for India's Muslims looking for freedom, equality, and opportunity away from a sea of Hindus.

A majority of the Muslims who fled India came from the north and were relatively prosperous. They are called *majhurs*, meaning immigrants, and were looked down upon, as is always the case in the world, by those who already lived there. Pervez Musharraf was born in Delhi. The Muslim poor of India and those from the south stayed in India.

Pakistan was comprised of five provinces: Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan, Northwest Frontier Province, and East Bengal, renamed East Pakistan in 1955. Pakistan has fought four wars with India: 1947-48, 1965, 1971, and 1999; and there have been multiple crises in between. In 1971, it lost East Pakistan in a civil war. It became Bangladesh.

In 1954 the U.S. signed a mutual defense agreement with Pakistan, marking the beginning of a U.S.-Pakistan military alignment. In 1955 the U.S. created The Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) to contain communism. Its member states were Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and the U.K. The U.S. did not join officially, but provided military aid to Pakistan and to other members. Pakistan joined the Southeast Treaty Organization (SEATO), cementing its ties to the U.S.

In 1941, Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, the Muslim scholar, established the *Jamaat-i-Islami* (Islamic Unity Council) in India, stating that Islam did not distinguish between the spiritual and temporal worlds. He opposed nationalism and said, like all Muslim fundamentalists, that there must be no separation between mosque and state.

After partition, he moved to Lahore, West Pakistan, where he established *Jamaat's* new headquarters and began to call for a pure Islamic country. Maududi was not the only activist Muslim fundamentalist in Pakistan, but he was the most famous.

On January 18, 1953, he insisted at a meeting of Islamic scholars that the new Pakistani constitution declare that *Kadiyanis*, or *Ahmadiyyas*, a Muslim sect that doesn't believe that Mohammad was the final prophet of God, be declared a non-Muslim minority and banned from all important government positions. At the time Zafarullah Khan, an *Ahmadiyya*, was Pakistan's foreign minister.²⁷

In February 1953 *Jamaat* cadres attacked *Ahmadiyyas*, killing hundreds. In March martial law was declared in Pakistan, and Maududi was arrested. On May 8, a military

²⁷ The *Ahmadiyya* sect was founded in what is now Pakistan in the 19th century. The *Ahmadiyyas* believe that Mohammad was not necessarily the last prophet. There are about 100 million *Ahmadiyyas* worldwide and about 100,000 in Bangladesh, where fundamentalists, who want the state to declare them non-Muslims, actively oppose them.

court sentenced him to death. He and his family refused to ask for clemency. He and his followers persisted in their demands.

In 1955 he was released because Pakistan needed help from fundamentalists to stop the independence movement in East Pakistan. They, who opposed nationalism, ironically, would be used by the state to keep it together. They kept agitating.

In 1973, socialist Prime Minister Ali Bhutto, under pressure from fundamentalists, made Islam the state religion. Jamaat and its youth wing, Islami Jamaat-e-Tulba, continued to press for more changes.

Bhutto agreed to allow the *Qur'an* to be taught in schools and set up a Council of Islamic Ideology to bring secular laws more in line with Islamic law, or sharia.²⁸ With the creation of Bangladesh, Baluch nationalism again raised its head. Islamist governments came to power in Baluchistan and the NWFP, as they would after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan. The secular state had failed, and people went to Islam.

Bhutto waged war in Baluchistan, sending 80,000 men against 1,000 insurgents.²⁹ When Bhutto first ran for office, his slogan was "Food, clothing, and shelter" for the poor. Now, this socialist, the only credible democratic leader in South Asia at the time, under pressure, gave in to the landowners and industrialists.³⁰

Bhutto's main adversaries, those who most hated godless socialism, were the fundamentalists. The Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), a coalition of religious parties, called for an Islamic government. Bhutto banned gambling, horse racing, and alcohol. He declared Friday, not Sunday, a day of rest. Fundamentalists were gaining power.

Bhutto won the elections of 1977, but there were allegations that he cheated, and the PNA took to the streets. The police killed demonstrators. Bhutto tried to negotiate with the PNA, but it was too late. No one knew it, but the winds of Islamic fundamentalism were gathering force and were about to sweep across the Muslim world.

Bhutto called his unctuous, obsequious Army Chief of Staff, General Zia ul-Haq, "a monkey"³¹ behind his back. This was a mistake. In March 1977 Zia, citing corruption, overthrew Bhutto and declared martial law. In April 4, 1978, Zia hanged him.

²⁸ Seyyed Vali Rez Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, p. 182.

²⁹ Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, p. 221.

³⁰ Hamza Alavi, "Pakistan: The Roots of Dictatorship," London: Zed Press, 1983, p. 51.

³¹ Hassan Abbas, "Pakistan's Drift Into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror," Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2005, p. 86.

Bhutto was an aristocrat, but Zia, born to a lower middle-class conservative Muslim family, understood the importance of Islam in people's lives as Bhutto did not.

Vali Nasr, now at the U.S. Naval War College, wrote: "*The polity, which had only five years earlier been overwhelmingly in support of populism and socialist idealism, had once again exposed itself to manipulation to Islamic symbols. The return of Islam to center stage was now complete . . . The seemingly implausible resurgence of Islam in lieu of socialism during the Bhutto era meant total victory for Islam and confirmed its central role in Pakistani politics.*"³²

Then came 1979, a momentous year in Muslim world:

In February, Ruhollah Khomeini overthrew the U.S.-backed, extremely secular Shah of Iran, the first Islamic fundamentalist victory over Westernization in history.³³

In March, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat signed a peace treaty with Israel.

In November, Wahhabi militants took over the mosque in Mecca, the center of Islam, and, quoting Khomeini, called for "an end to corruption,³⁴ ostentation, and mindless imitation of the West." The Saudi government sent in Saudi soldiers and finally French Special Forces, who put down the revolt.

In December, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

In 1980, Abdullah Azzam, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and professor at Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, moved to Peshawar to support the mujahideen. Azzam, a Palestinian who had lost his home when Israel was created, had a Ph.D. from al-Azhar University where he was known as the "Emir of Jihad."

At Abdul Aziz, he had influenced Osama bin Laden, a student there. In 1981, bin Laden followed him to Peshawar. "*Right now fighting is compulsory on each and every Muslim on earth,*" Azzam wrote, words which influenced Muslims around the world.

Many felt that General Zia ul-Haq would be overthrown because of rising prices in Pakistan and the fall of the Shah. But the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan kept him in power. Zia allied himself further with religious parties. He ordered public schools to teach Arabic and Islamic studies. New textbooks espoused jihad.

³² Nasr, p. 182.

³³ The Algerian war of independence, from November 1954 to July 1962, ending 130 years of French colonization, was the last Muslim victory, but was not a fundamentalist victory.

³⁴ In the U.S., at the same time, Jerry Falwell and Tim LaHaye created the Moral Majority to fight secularism and to involve Christians in public life. It was disbanded in 1989 when Pat Robertson founded the Christian Coalition to take up the banner.

He “created a chain of deeni madaris (madrasahs) along the Afghan-Pakistani border . . . in order to create a belt of religiously oriented students who would assist the Afghan Mujahideen to evict the Soviets from Afghanistan,”³⁵ wrote one Pakistani general.

Zia also needed soldiers for his political war against civilian political parties. Zia was killed in a plane crash in 1988, but the Islamization of modern Pakistan that he and the U.S., his ally, indirectly set in motion with the war in Afghanistan continued.

In 1989, the war in Kashmir got worse. Al-Qaeda was born, and then came 9/11 and the war on terrorism. Today there is talk of the Italianization of Pakistan.

In July 2005, a Pew poll showed that 51% of Pakistanis said that Osama bin Laden “would do the right thing in world affairs.” It was the only country beside Jordan, which has a large Palestinian population, where a majority polled said it supported bin Laden.

I went to talk to one of the most prominent and outspoken Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan, Abdul Rashid Ghazi, who, with his elder brother, Maulana Abdul Aziz Ghazi, are the Imams or leaders of the famous Lal or Red Mosque, a Deobandi mosque named after of the color of its bricks, in Islamabad. Ghazi sat on a carpet in a small grey tent in the back of the mosque.

Outside boys and men walked by. “Young people are becoming more reactionary,” said Ghazi. “They say, ‘We want to kill Americans.’ This is wrong. We say the American Army can be attacked because they have attacked our brothers in the Afghan jihad. To kill the American Army is jihad, not because we like killing but because it is a defense against aggression. It has nothing to do with religion.”

There were stacks of bricks, piles of sand, and a cement mixer around. The mosque and its accompanying madrasahs – it has 10,000 students, approximately 5,500 women and 4,500 men – are growing.

Ghazi, who spoke excellent English, had a smiling, gentle way about him. He said he expected 6,700 female students this year, making his female madrasah, called Jamia Hafsa, the largest in the world. His religious center is the second largest in Pakistan. In 1947, there were 136 madrasahs in Pakistan. Today there are 30,000.³⁶

“If someone attacks innocent people, then we must attack them,” he said. “NATO in Afghanistan is really America. It does what America says. The greater the U.S. presence here the more that Islam will gain in strength.”

³⁵ Kamal Matinuddin, *The Taliban Phenomenon: Afghanistan, 1994-1997*, Karachi, Oxford, 1999, p. 14.

³⁶ Abbas, p. 204.

In February students from Jamia Hafsa, in black abayas with only their eyes showing, went into the streets, one holding a rifle, others sticks, protesting a government plan to demolish the Lal Mosque because it was on public land. The government backed down.

“Before 9/11,” said Ghazi, “most people in Islamabad didn’t know what a madrasah was, but then the U.S. began to talk about how dangerous they were. Since then our enrollment has doubled. People who were donating money have doubled their contributions.”

“We are grateful to America for helping us. Since the American invasion of Afghanistan, the number of people who have come to pray has increased.”

The world’s mightiest Christian power, allied with the Pakistani Army, was next door. The three “A’s” of Pakistan say the people are “America, Allah, and the Army.”

After the British put down the rebellion of 1857 and the Wahhabi revolt by 1868, Muslims felt weak, and religious observance became important to them, as it did in Baghdad after the Mongols conquered them.³⁷ I do not think that it is this way in Pakistan, a complicated secular culture, but in Peshawar, one prominent mosque is so crowded that men pray outside in the streets.

“A female madrasah is a new phenomenon in Pakistan,” said Ghazi, once rumored to be close to bin Laden. “For centuries there were mostly only male madaris in South Asia, although there were a few female ones in the countryside. My father started a female madrasah in three rooms for 50 female students.”

“It is unusual in South Asia for a man to let his daughter live somewhere else. I would not like my daughter to stay with a relative. It is psychologically hard for a man, but we are giving emotional care to young men and women, and people have confidence in us.”

Fahat Taj, a Pakistani and senior fellow at the Centre for Women and Gender Studies at the University of Oslo, wrote an article about it in Pakistan’s *Daily Times*. She sent it to me. “I was surrounded by girls ages 5-20. They rise at 5 a.m., don’t watch television which they say is banned in Islam, do not play games, or go on field trips.”

“They are being groomed to be the wives and mothers of jihadis, female suicide bombers, and foot soldiers willing to fight Pakistani authorities if necessary. They asked

³⁷ “Religious Reform Movement of the Muslims, *Sirajul Islam, History of Bangladesh*, Vol. 3, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992; M. A. Karandikar, *Islam in India’s Transition to Modernity*, Bombay: Orient Longman, 1968, p. 100.

me to kill the Danish editor responsible for the cartoons. They shouted *Osama Zindabad* (Long live Osama) for minutes on end.”

Taj said the students told her that her clothes were “too tight” and called her *peypardah*, one who has strayed from Islam. The principal said the girls were from middle class and even “rich families.” Many walked her to the door, curious about her, a Ph.D., living on her own in the evil, decadent West.

“The government has been opposed to us, to show America that it is opposed,” said Ghazi. We are educating children. We teach the *Koran* and *Hadith*, reading and Urdu, general science, geography, math, and English. We understand the government’s position, but publicly we must oppose it. Musharraf is not sincere with Pakistan or with the U.S., only in his desire to remain on the throne. He is playing a dangerous game.”

Men came to say hello and chat for a few minutes. He left the tent to talk with them. “The fire will increase in Pakistan. Bush and Musharraf are trying to wash blood with blood. It won’t wash away.” He was referring to the U.S. missile attacks in FATA in January and October 2006, which killed Pakistani civilians.

“The government is at war with our people only to please America.” It is a statement one hears repeatedly in Pakistan.

I asked Ghazi about democracy.

“In Islam if I want a position, I automatically become illegible for it,” he said. If I have the capacity to serve and am appointed by an Emir Khalifa, the highest authority in Islam, and don’t use it for personal gain, I can do that.”

“If I am the Khalifa (Caliph) and have a shura (Islamic council), and ask anyone in the Shura for advice, and if he says it is not good for the country, I can still do it. This is not democracy. It is a kind of dictatorship.”

“Most of the people in Pakistan are poor and illiterate. If I am a criminal and ask poor serfs to vote for me, this is wrong. Islam says there are people who are intellectually rich who have the wisdom to guide the caliphate. These are the selected people. The Khalifa is a spiritual authority, but he must remain within the boundaries of Islam and justice.”

I asked about religious political parties.

“They misuse the Islamic spirit,” he said. “Islam can only come in an Islamic way. To gain power and to say I will then bring Islam—no, it will be something other than Islam.”

“First I am Muslim, then I am Pakistani, then I am Baluch, my tribe. Non-Muslims are our brothers because it is our duty to take the message to them. I tell them about Allah almighty: that there is one God, all powerful, and that the Prophet, peace be unto him, is his last messenger. Jesus, Moses, Ibrahim (Abraham) are all messengers of God.”

Ghazi was a preacher and now preaching to me.

“After you come to Islam, all other religions become null and void. I am not saying they are not the truth. When a new law is made, the previous law becomes inactive. The Holy *Qur’an*, the revealed book, is for all humanity. Islam is the solution to all our problems. It must come from within.”

Ghazi’s phone kept ringing, and people kept coming. It was time to go.

“This life is just an examination hall; the final decision will be made in the life hereafter. There is always an exam, whether I have money or not, my deeds will be noted. Ultimately people around the earth will realize the truth, God willing.”

THE RISE OF THE TALIBAN

The Deobandi, Maududi, and other fundamentalists opposed the creation of Pakistan because it went against Islam’s internationalist message. They later disdained of Pakistan’s elite drinking alcohol, wearing Western clothes, and sending their children to schools modeled on the British system – all mimicking their former colonial masters.

Political religious parties, those to which Ghazi had referred, in spite of their disdain of the neo-colonial elite, aligned themselves with Pakistan’s military establishment for power, this worldly god.

Fundamentalists backed Zia because their goal was and is to reunite Muslims in the Subcontinent and to regain the power the Muslim Mogul Empire had before Europeans arrived. Madaris grew from the hundreds into the thousands.

The U.S. and its allies gave billions of dollars in arms to the Pakistanis during the Afghan-Soviet war. The ISI sent the arms to groups it supported.³⁸ Some in the CIA in the 1980s worried about supporting this. They were afraid of “blowback,” as in what you create could blow back to hit you. Conservatives called the CIA a liberal organization.

³⁸ “*What is most important to the history of the world?*” asked Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter’s National Security Advisor, in an interview with *le Nouvel Observateur* in 1998. “*The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet Empire? Some stirred up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?*”

The mujahideen was a proxy army. The Taliban, its next such army, faced what became the Northern Alliance: Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, backed by India, Iran, and Russia.

Again, Pakistan sent young men to Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda helped train them. There are many men now who have trained in Afghanistan, who have watched Israel's wars, and America's long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq on television. They have learned about the Crusades and colonialism in school.

They have seen Muslims hijack airplanes and destroy U.S. targets in Beirut and Saudi Arabia in the 1980s, the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the U.S.S. *Cole* in 2000; they watched the World Trade Center buildings crumble and the bombings in Bali, Madrid, and London.

They have felt power that Muslims, with God as their strength, could strike back at the West. They, like all people, seek the comfort of brotherhood, of belonging, of knowing the truth; they want the thrill of being alive and a part of a movement, purpose in life.

Mansoor and Mir Saib Khan scanned the ridgeline of a canyon we were walking through. "I have found 20 caches of weapons for the Americans," said Mansoor. "There are millions of dollars of weapons hidden in Afghanistan from the time of the jihad." He pointed east towards Pakistan.

"Everything, from landmines to modern weapons, comes across the border at night without any problems. The Taliban are returning," he said. "Three years ago I was optimistic, but now I am losing hope. I am more afraid than before."

Ahmed Rashid, author of *The Taliban* wrote in a column for the BBC on December 5, 2006, "*Most of the Afghan prisoners at Guantanamo and at Bagram, the U.S. base and prison, in Afghanistan, are Pashtuns, and so are the thousands of civilian casualties who have been bombed by mistake or carelessness in southern Afghanistan by U.S. and NATO pilots. U.S. soldiers who knocked down doors and interrogated women, alienating the population, did so in the largely Pashtun south.*"

So were those killed by U.S. missiles in 2006.

The road from Kabul to Gardez, a 2-hour drive, is paved. In 2003, foreigners walked in Gardez. Today, there is not a foreigner in sight. In December, my Afghan guides and I stayed with a man named Mahmoud just outside of town.

"He hates Americans," said one of my guides. "It is only because of Pashtunwali that you are here."

We sat in his hujra on cushions against the wall. A bukhari, which our host fed with kindling, kept us warm. It was snowing outside.

“I joined the Taliban, but when the Americans came I joined the Afghan army,” said Abdul, 24, our driver. “I did it for the money. They said my pay would go up each month, but it didn’t. In an operation in Kunar, our commander went off by himself. An hour later he hadn’t come back. We went to find him and found him with his head cut off by the Taliban.” He drank his tea, warming to his subject.

“We were in a village in Helmand. It was June or July 2004. We were in a battle and the U.S. commander was killed, and so they called in helicopters and destroyed the village. The U.S. took the wounded to a hospital in Kandahar. Three men in our unit were killed. We took their bodies to their villages. But the people refused to go to their funerals. The soldiers were with the Americans and therefore against Islam.”

“It was for these two reasons that I quit the army. I came to dislike the Americans, and I wanted someone to come to my funeral. I love the Taliban. They are Muslims. Only God can remove Muslims from Afghanistan.”

I asked my host, who works in Saudi Arabia as a laborer, his thoughts.

“During the jihad, the Americans supported us. Now they have become the invaders. The division between the communists and the mujahideen still exists. The worst enemies are the communists because they do not believe in God. The Americans believe in God. The Taliban are better than the mujahideen because they have studied Islam and are more God fearing.”

His son, Abdullah, 10, an energetic, bright-eyed boy whom he wanted to send to a madrasah in Peshawar, told me he liked Americans. “They bring us cookies and other good things at school. But the teacher keeps everything.”

Our host had daughters, but, like most rural Afghans, was ashamed to admit it. I said that the Prophet Mohammed supported education. “I am not a mullah,” he said. He couldn’t think for himself. We ate dinner and left early the next morning. The road from Gardez to Khost was mostly dirt and rutted and covered with snow.

“Where have all the millions gone,” asked my guides. “Where is all the reconstruction money?”

The West and Japan have given over \$14 billion dollars in aid to Afghanistan, but there is little sign of it in Khost and Paktia. A friend in the Finance Ministry said that only \$4 billion has gone to the government. The rest has gone to NGOs, called by Afghans “cows who drink their own milk,” and to foreign corporations.

Small cemeteries and mosques dot the landscape. In every roadside restaurant or tea shop, at every gas station, by every stream, men bow at prayer times towards Mecca.

By noon we reached a small village of wood huts and baked mud houses. We sat outside in a restaurant, a raised platform above the road. Behind the restaurant were a stream and a small pale yellow concrete mosque, the only modern building in the area.

At least fifty men squatted by the stream, performing wadu, their ablutions; then they bowed in the dirt, southwest towards Mecca. There was no more room in the mosque.

A U.S. Army convoy came down the road. The men in the village casually watched it pass. A few soldiers, standing up behind their weapons, looked around. The Soviets had allies in the country. The U.S., my guides said, cannot be sure who is on their side.

We approached Khost. The road was now paved. Another U.S. convoy moved slowly down the middle of the road, forcing other cars off to the side. The convoy stopped, and cars stopped. No car is allowed within 300 meters or so of an ISAF or U.S. convoy.

My companions muttered to one another. "The Americans . . . What happens if a father has to rush his sick child to the hospital? He must wait. The child may die."

A journalist friend was embedded with the U.S. Army in Nouristan. "We were in a convoy, and the soldiers would shout at people on the road "Hey hajji, get out of the way." Many Afghans, who can scrape together enough money to go on "hajj," or pilgrimage to Mecca, proudly put hajji in front of their first name as an honorific.

Before the U.S. Army invaded Italy in World War II, it passed out small, thin red booklets to soldiers telling them about Italy's history, its museums, its culture, and told them how to act.

When I was in the Army in 1970 and 1971, some U.S. soldiers called the Vietnamese "slopes, gooks," and "slant-heads." There is racism and anti-Islamic feelings among NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan. I have observed it over the past few years. AMF personnel talked about it.

"The image of the U.S. is not good in Afghanistan," said Eshaq. "U.S. soldiers searching women is totally unacceptable in Afghanistan, the reports of the desecration of the Holy *Koran* at Guantanamo, the cartoons in Denmark. Everyone listens to the BBC and VOA."

"The longer the war goes on in Iraq, the more the U.S. supports Israel against the Palestinians, the more the image is that the U.S. is against Muslims," said Eshaq.

We reached Khost, a welcome oasis in a barren land. Looming above the city like a cathedral in Europe was a new mosque, with a turquoise dome and twin minarets.

It was built by Jalaladin Haqqani with Arab money. In 1995 he joined the Taliban and in September 2001 became their military commander.

“Haqqani is in Pakistan,” said Mansoor. “He controls the Taliban insurgency along the border. Everybody knows this.”

There were news reports that Haqqani met with U.S. officials after 9/11. They felt they could work with him as they had done before. In December, I met with one of his former bodyguards in Kabul. “We went to the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad,” he said. “The Americans offered him a position, but he declined.”

“We do not trust in the might of arms, rather we believe in sacrificing our lives for the cause of Islam and honor of the motherland,” said Haqqani afterwards. “We will retreat to the mountains and begin a long guerrilla war to reclaim our pure land from infidels and free our country like we did against the Soviets.”³⁹

“Jalaladin is stronger than ever,” said Mansoor. “His son is the commander for Khost and Paktia provinces. During jihad against the Soviets, Jalaladin said that an Afghan could marry an American girl, but not a Russian. Today he says that Americans are worse than Russians. They are the worst Crusaders.”

I sat that night in the back room of a small medical clinic drinking tea with a doctor and a judge, an older man with a thin white beard. The streets were dark and empty. A dim light hung from the ceiling. “I am a judge, but people no longer trust the courts,” he said. “They are corrupt. They prefer to have tribal elders settle their disputes.”

I asked what he thought of the Taliban.

“Under the Taliban, we left our shops unlocked. The people supported them. If you cut off one hand of a thief, it will stop all crime. Today we are tired of crime and corruption. That is why the Taliban are coming back. When justice ends, people are afraid to come to the city. The shopkeeper is no longer honest.”

He asked if I had read the *Koran*. “You will find everything there,” he said.

³⁹ Reuters, October 20, 2001.

“For Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the target is the same – the revival of Islam. The Taliban are concerned about Afghanistan, and al-Qaeda’s goals are worldwide. If the Americans would leave, we could, with a dirty look, drive the Northern Alliance from Kabul.”

I later heard a story about a painter. The city gave him a contract to paint a municipal building. When he finished, the Taliban called him to Waziristan. They cut off his head as an example to others who might work with the government.

One afternoon I was near a village outside of Khost. Down the main road, a long line of people came walking slowly. A man in front banged a drum slowly. The day before we had passed a field in which hundreds of men stood and sat together.

They were protesting U.S. Army tactics. Two Afghan journalists later told me the following: Earlier that week, U.S. soldiers surrounded a house in the village. Their interpreter, from Kandahar, told the Afghans to come out. The Americans had intelligence that there were Taliban inside. The family thought they were surrounded by Taliban because the man shouting had a Kandahari accent.

They were afraid because one man worked for a bank in Khost, another man with the police. They were tied to the government. They opened fire. The Americans killed them, including a 13-year-old girl. They beat another man with a rifle butt. I was concerned that the villagers would see me, an American.

I thought of Masnoor, not his real name, the intelligence officer who was one of my guides. He insisted that we go to a restaurant in Khost for lunch. He ordered two large cans of beer and drank them. I was amazed that he could find beer in Khost and that he would drink. He wanted a lot of money from me. I didn’t trust him.

We returned to Kabul. In 2002, it was a crowded but happy place, beginning to fill with traffic and hope. Women were beginning to show their faces; men were shaving their beards, and Americans were boasting, in print and on television, how easily they had defeated the Taliban.

I had lunch one day in Kabul in 2006 with an assistant to Ahmed Shah Massoud, the commander killed by al-Qaeda two days before 9/11. “Our hope is gone,” he said. “We are watching and waiting for when we will again fight the Taliban in Kabul.”

Kabul is a Tajik city. When Mullah Omar was “emir” of Afghanistan, he only visited here once or twice, before retreating home to Kandahar, a Pashtun city.

There are two seven-story high-rises in Kabul now, one with an elevator and a roof top restaurant. Most of the women in the streets only wear a scarf over their heads; young women walk alone or with boys their age; young men jog in Shar-e-Nau park early in

the mornings; middle class women walk through a new shopping mall with an escalator; there are women in Parliament.

The writ of the Karzai government is said to reach only to the end of Kabul. Everyone talks of corruption. President Karzai, elected in part because Afghans felt he could bring in foreign assistance, is not implicated, but no one can say a good word about his advisors or about some of his family members.

One day, just after dawn, I watched an Italian convoy pass by, its soldiers in body armor. A soldier waved, and I waved back. Everyone stays away from convoys. The suicide attackers target them. The West does not realize that the Christian West cannot impose itself upon deeply Muslim Afghanistan.

Americans, a man said to me, must realize that not everyone wants to be an American. High rises and modern restaurants do not mean anything to people who are willing to live in the mountains and in the desert and to die for what they believe is right.