



FOREIGN POLICY
CASE STUDY No. 3

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Development of Pakistan's
Foreign Policy:

**Case Study on
Recognition of Taliban**

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DEVELOPMENT OF PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY:
CASE STUDY ON PAKISTAN'S RECOGNITION OF TALIBAN

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FOREWORD

Development of Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Case Study on the Recognition of Taliban, is a special presentation by PILDAT in the context of the PILDAT Short Course for Parliamentarians and Politicians on The Foreign Policy Process in Pakistan. Developed by PILDAT, as a part of the Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Consortium - PLSC, supported financially by the USAID, the case study presents a detailed commentary on the factors leading to Pakistan's Foreign Policy decision to recognise Taliban in May 1997. The objective of the case study is to identify major actors, their perspectives and their influence in shaping Pakistan's policy on the issue.

Authored by Dr. Tahir Amin, Visiting Prof. at LUMS, the case study aims to enhance the knowledge and awareness of parliamentarians on various influencing factors and actors shaping Pakistan's policy on the issue. It is hoped that the study would serve to highlight the need of a strengthened and organised role of Parliament in shaping, influencing and reviewing Pakistan's foreign policy decisions and options.

The author, PILDAT and its team of researchers have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the contents of this paper. PILDAT, however, does not accept any responsibility of any omission or error as it is not deliberate.

The views expressed in this case study belong to the author and are not necessarily shared by PILDAT, PLSC or USAID.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ISI	Inter Services Intelligence
JUI-F	Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (Fazl-ur-Rehman Group)
JUI-S	Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (Sami-ul-Haq Group)
LJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
PIA	Pakistan International Airlines
PPP	Pakistan Peoples' Party
PTCL	Pakistan Telecommunication Corporation Limited
SS	Sipah-i-Sahaba
TNSM	Tehreek-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-Mohammadi
U.S. / U.S.A.	United States of America
UN	United Nations

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PROFILE OF THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tahir Amin is currently a Visiting Prof. at the Department of Social Science at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) Lahore. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, United States. He has been on the Iqbal Chair (1997-2001) at the Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK. He has also been a Visiting Scholar at the Harvard University (1992) on Fulbright Fellowship and has been a Visiting Fellow (1996) at the Watson School of International Studies, Brown University, USA. He has also taught at the Boston College, Boston as an adjunct Prof. in the Department of Political Science. He has been the Prof. and Chairman of the Department of International Relations at the Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

Dr. Tahir Amin has written several books and articles on International Relations and South Asian politics. His books include: *Afghanistan Crisis: Implications and Options For Iran, Pakistan and the Muslim World* (1982) *Nationalism versus Internationalism in Liberalism, Marxism and Islam* (1987), *Ethno-national Movements of Pakistan: Domestic and International Factors* (1988), *Mass Resistance in Kashmir Origins, Evolution and Options* (1995). He is the co-author in an international project *Theorising World Orders: A historical, Hermeneutic and Dialectical Inquiry*. Other co-authors of the project include Hayward R. Alker Jr. (University of Southern California), Thomas Biersteker (Brown University) and Takashi Inoguchi (Tokyo University).

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Introduction

The government of Pakistan under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif extended recognition to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan on May 25, 1997.

Although the decision was in accordance with the standard norms of International law and diplomacy where because the Taliban regime was in effective control of territory and population and was able to fulfil its international obligations, the decision had serious long term political, economic and strategic consequences for Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asian republics and the rest of the world.¹ Apparently, short-term strategic considerations outweighed the long-term considerations in the calculations of the Pakistani decision-makers.

The decision to support Taliban regime not only alienated the non-*Pushtun* ethnic groups of Afghanistan making the task of formation of broad-based government difficult but also ensured the continuity of the civil war in Afghanistan a certain possibility. The very nature of the Taliban regime and its policies had serious repercussions for Pakistan's polity, economy, society and the foreign policy. The N.W.F.P and Baluchistan were deeply influenced by the Taliban policies of Islamisation; economy of Pakistan suffered because of smuggling via Afghan Transit Trade and Pakistan began to become isolated internationally.² Iran, Turkey, China, Central Asian republics began to question the wisdom of Pakistan's support for the Taliban regime. The United States and Saudi Arabia, who had initially supported Pakistan's policy, also withheld their support, leaving Pakistan isolated in the international community.

The main purpose of this case study is to analyse the pros and cons of this decision focusing on four questions: 1) Why did Pakistan recognise the Taliban government in 1997? (2) How was the policy of support for Taliban formulated? (3) What were the consequences of the policy? (4) And what lessons should be learnt from this case?

Question of Recognition

The Pakistani decision-makers perceived several strategic, economic, and political advantages in taking this crucial decision. They viewed Taliban as a pro-Pakistan force

capable of bringing law and order to the war-ravaged Afghanistan which had descended into anarchy since the fall of Najibullah Regime in 1992. They believed that a stable Afghanistan under Taliban would protect Pakistan's strategic interests vis-à-vis other regional powers like India, Russia and Iran.³ It will also provide a safe haven for the Kashmiri *Mujahideen* who had been waging their struggle against India. They also believed that a stable Afghanistan would provide a bridge to Central Asia, opening the transportation routes, boosting trade and giving Pakistan an easy access to the energy resources of Central Asia. They also thought that since the Taliban's movement had a *Pushtun* origin, they would not revive the issue of *Pushtunistan* with Pakistan because of their gratitude to Pakistan.⁴

Pakistani decision-makers were extremely frustrated over the continuing civil war in Afghanistan in the wake of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Their efforts to bridge the differences among the *Mujahideen* had failed. Several agreements such as Peshawar Accord, Jalalabad Agreement, Islamabad Declaration, failed because of the lack of mutual trust among the *Mujahideen* leaders and the lack of implementation. Pakistan backed *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen*, led by Gulbadeen Hikmatyar had also failed to capture Kabul which was under the control of Burhan uddin Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Masood.

Afghanistan had fallen under the sway of various warlords who had carved out their separate fiefdoms and were engaged in looting, plundering and rapes. The roads were blocked by these warlords who levied their own taxes on the vehicles and the Afghan populations was suffering immensely because of anarchic conditions in the country.⁵ The Taliban, a product of the *Deobandi Madressahs*, established in the *Pushtun* belt of the NWFP and Baluchistan in the wake of the Soviet military intervention in December 1979, rose on the political horizons of Afghanistan in late 1994.⁶ In lightning raids, they scored swift victories and captured the major cities of Afghanistan Kandahar, Jalalabad, Herat, Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif, controlling more than 90 per cent of the Afghan territory.

Given Pakistan's involvement, some scholars regarded Taliban as purely Pakistan's creation but others considered it a more complex phenomena.⁷ The reality is that Talibans filled a vacuum in Afghanistan and met the expectations of the Afghan people who were yearning for stability in the

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country.

Pakistani decision-makers believed that a friendly Afghanistan under Taliban's control would protect Pakistan's strategic interests vis-à-vis the rival powers. The Rabbani Regime had developed close relationship with India, Russia and Iran. They had also allowed the destruction of Pakistani Embassy in Afghanistan in 1994.⁸ Pakistan feared a New-DelhiKabulMoscow axis, which existed in the 60s and 70s, which could greatly disturb Pakistan's security environment. It was believed by the Pakistani decision-makers that the Taliban controlled Afghanistan would not only keep the rival powers out but also provide a "strategic depth" to Pakistan in the case of a prolonged military conflict with India.⁹ It was also believed that the Kashmiri *Mujahideen* would continue to avail the training facilities in Afghanistan under the Taliban's control.

Pakistan was desperate to open up to Central Asia but its access was blocked because of continuing civil war in Afghanistan. Pakistan's shortest and the best routes to Central Asia lay through Afghanistan. In September 1994, Pakistan had tried to open a route, which went through Quetta-Chaman-Kandahar-Herat and Ashkabad (Turkmenistan), however, its convoy was stopped by the local Afghan warlords near Kandhar, which was freed by the Taliban.¹⁰ Besides, Pakistan, the United States and Saudi Arabia were also keen to restore law and order in Afghanistan because of their interest in the gas pipe line from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan. The US multinational Unocal and the Saudi multinational Delta in association with other western business concerns were keen to invest in the project.¹¹

Since the majority of the Taliban were *Pushtuns* and had grown up in the Pakistani refugee camps, Pakistani leadership believed that a grateful Taliban regime would refrain from reviving *Pushtunistan* issue which has been a source of great tensions in the past between the two countries.¹²

Formulation of the Pro-Taliban Policy

It appears that the policy of support for the Taliban was initiated during the second Benazir regime (1993-1996) and was continued during the Nawaz Sharif (1997-99) and Musharraf's regime until the 9/11 events when the U.S.

forced Pakistan to take a U-turn on its Afghan policy.¹³

The policy for the support of the Taliban was apparently conceived by Gen. (retd) Naseerullah Babar, the Interior Minister during the PPP regime and had the support of the *Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam* (JUI) led by Maulana Fazalur-Rehamn which controlled the bulk of those *Deeni Madressahs* in the NWFP and Baluchistan.¹⁴ The transporters, drug mafias, other extremist Sunni organisations like the *Sipah-i-Sahaba*, (SSP) *Lashka-e-Jhangvi*, (LJ), *Tehreek-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-Mohammadi*, (TNSM) also supported the policy. The Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and the foreign office were apparently divided and were late converts to the policy.¹⁵

Gen. (retd) Naseerullah Babar was the in-charge of the Afghan policy during former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's rule (1971-77) and had masterminded the arming of the Afghan opposition led by Hikmatyar and Ahmed Shah Masood against Sardar Daud's regime (1973-1978).¹⁶ With Benazir Bhutto in power in 1993, he was entrusted with the task of reopening the route to Central Asian Republics through Afghanistan. He negotiated with the Afghan warlords to open the Quetta-Chaman-Kandahar-Herat route to Turkmenistan. The Pakistani convoy was stopped by the warlords in September 1994, which was freed by the Taliban.¹⁷ Many observers believe that Pakistan, having seen the potential of the nascent movement of the Taliban, began to support the movement which paved the way for their swift victories in Afghanistan.¹⁸ The *Deeni Madressahs* led by the JUI (F) provided the manpower. Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, a close ally of the PPP who had been made the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee of Foreign Affairs, also played a key role in garnering the support for the Taliban in the corridors of power. Various Pakistani governmental organisations like the PTCL, Railway, PIA and Ministry of Communications provided the infrastructural assistance to the Taliban. The ISI began to provide military supplies, logistical support, technical know how and the extensive knowledge of the Afghan situation.¹⁹ Apparently, the ISI and the foreign office were reluctant to support the Taliban in the beginning because of their potential implications for the broad-based political settlement in Afghanistan, however, fastly changing ground realities in the favour of Taliban forced them to shift their policies and throw their weight in the favour of the Taliban. Different actors had different interests in supporting the

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Taliban. Gen. (Retd.) Naseerullah Babar and the military officers in ISI were motivated by the *Pushtun* ethnicity and viewed Taliban as the "Pushtun proxies"²⁰ They wanted to revive the Pushtun fortunes in Afghanistan. It was first time that Kabul was being controlled by the *Tajiks* and it was painful for the Pushtuns to see Kabul under their control. The JUI (F) the JUI (S) and other extremist Sunni organisations like SSP, LJ, TNSM viewed Taliban's victories as the *Deobandi's* revolution and expected the same kind of revolution in Pakistan.²¹ The transporters' lobbies in Pakistan considered Taliban as a god-given saviour who were instrumental in removing the barriers on the roads in Afghanistan. They were sick of paying to the multitudes of Afghan warlords, who had virtually paralysed their business. The drug dealers also saw their vested interest in supporting the Taliban as they only demanded the tax on their product and had little qualm about the international concerns regarding drug controls.²²

Consequences of the Policy

Apparently, the policy of support for the Taliban appeared well suited for Pakistan's strategic, economic and political interests. The Taliban were controlling more than 90 per cent of Afghanistan and had pushed their rivals, Northern Alliance, to the wall. They had been recognised by Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. and were in the process of negotiating their recognition with the United States.²³ However, there were serious long-term negative consequences of this policy for Afghanistan, Pakistan, the regional countries and the rest of the world, which had not been properly thought through while formulating the policy.

The policy of support for the Taliban alienated other Afghan ethnic groups to the degree where the goal of a broad-based government became impossible to achieve. The very nature of the Taliban regime and their policies created severe problems for Pakistan as its polity, economy, and foreign policy began to be affected by the Taliban policies. The non-compromising attitude of the Taliban regime created difficulties for Pakistan with the United States and Saudi Arabia, eventually leading them to turn against Taliban. The ideology of Taliban alarmed Iran, Russia, Central Asian republics who began to support anti-Taliban forces actively.

The policy of support for the Taliban, who were primarily *Pushtuns*, deeply alienated the non-*Pushtun* minorities of

Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a diverse country consisting of many ethnic groups. According to 1973 census in Afghanistan, the Pushtuns constituted 43 per cent of the population, the *Tajiks* 24 per cent, *Uzbeks* 6 per cent, *Hazaras* 5 per cent, *Aimaqs* 5 per cent and *Farsiwans* 4 per cent.²⁴ Although, the *Pushtuns* have been historically predominant in Afghanistan and have been ruling the country, but ten years' war against the Soviets had changed the nature of inter-ethnic relations in Afghanistan. *Tajik*, *Uzbek* and *Hazaras* had also actively participated in the war of resistance.²⁵ Burhanuddin Rabbani, Ahmad Shah Masood, Ismael Khan, Abdul Rashid Dostum and the other prominent leaders from the non-*Pushtun* minorities could no longer be ignored from the broad-based settlement in Afghanistan. The policy of support for the Taliban made the Taliban intransigent in seeking a broad-based settlement. They began to believe that the military victory was the only solution. Furthermore, the policies pursued by the Taliban under the name of Islam had a deep imprint of the *Pushtun* culture and traditions, which was sharply incompatible with the non-*Pushtun* cultures, thus adding fuel to the fire in the non-*Pushtun* areas. As a consequence, the non-*Pushtun* groups actively sought foreign backers to survive. Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Masood sought help from India, Russia, and Iran; Ismael Khan from Iran; Abdul Rashid Dostum from Uzbekistan and Turkey and Shia groups from Iran.²⁶

The very nature of the Taliban regime and the policies pursued by them began to affect Pakistan's polity, economy and foreign policy. In the words of Ahmed Rashid, Pakistan became a "Victim" rather than a "Master".²⁷ Since the Taliban were the product of the Pakistani *Deeni Madressahs* and they had utilised the manpower base of these institutions irrespective of their nationality, therefore majority of them believed that Pakistan was not an Islamic state and was the prime candidate for a Taliban style revolution.²⁸ They wanted a *Deobandi* revolution in Pakistan as well. Inspired by the success of Taliban in Afghanistan, the *Tehreek-i-NifazShariat-i-Muhammadi* started in the Bajur Agency of Pakistan in 1995 culminating in a rebellion, which was eventually crushed by the army, leading to a lot of loss of lives.²⁹ The impact of the Taliban's success was conspicuous in the NWFP and Baluchistan where the JUI (F) had considerable following. Had the Taliban regime stayed in power for some years, Talibanisation of these two provinces could not have been ruled out, leading to a chaos and anarchy in the Pakistani society.³⁰

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Pakistan's economy also deeply suffered because of Taliban's policies. Afghan Transit Trade facility became a racket for smuggling of all kinds of luxury items to the Pakistani markets. Since Afghanistan did not have the market for many of the goods exported to Afghanistan, therefore, these goods would re-enter the Pakistani markets leading to a loss in terms of duties and taxes which Pakistani government would have received otherwise. Similarly, the drug trade began to flourish in Afghanistan and Pakistan because the Taliban did not see anything un-Islamic in the poppy cultivation as long as the producers continue to pay the state taxes. They appeared little concerned with the attendant social consequences or international concerns.³¹

Pakistan's foreign policy suffered most as it became isolated both regionally and internationally. Iran, Turkey, China, Russia and Central Asian republics became estranged from Pakistan over its Taliban policy. Iran was deeply concerned over Taliban's extreme anti-Shia policy and their mistreatment of the Shia population in Hazarajat and Herat. Assassination of Iranian diplomats in Herat nearly led to a full-scale war between Iran and Afghanistan.³² Iran viewed Pakistan's Taliban policy as a part of wider U.S.-Saudi plot to encircle Iran. Turkey was not happy over the treatment of the non-Pushtun minorities and sought to give protection and assistance to Dostum against Taliban. China was greatly concerned about the impact of Taliban regime's policies over its own Muslim population which was increasingly becoming restive and rebellious. Russia and Central Asian Republics were deeply apprehensive of the potentially destabilising impact of the Taliban regime's policies on Central Asian Republics. Taliban had recognised Chechnya as an independent republic in 2000 and allowed them to open their embassy in Kabul.³³ They had also given refuge to the leaders of the dissident Islamic movements of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in their country. Saudi Arabia and the United States, who had initially supported the Taliban, also began to distance themselves because of the non-compromising attitude of the regime. Saudis were annoyed over Taliban's protection and support of Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda and the U.S. was deeply concerned over their gender policies, drug economy and support for the terrorist groups. During the Clinton administration, the U.S. had launched a missile attack on the terrorist camps in Afghanistan in 1998. Pakistan was practically alone in supporting the Taliban regime in the world. Pakistan's isolation both at regional and international levels over the

issue of the support for the Taliban regime was nearly universal. The events of Sept. 11, 2001, though not the focus of this paper, vindicate the disastrous nature of this policy which plunged Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Muslim Ummah in an unending cycle of turmoil vis-à-vis the West.

Concluding Reflections

There are several important lessons to be learnt from this case study. First important lesson is that if the pros and cons of significant decisions are not thought through, the country has to suffer the consequences of the policy. Contrary to the widely held perception about the dominant role of the ISI in the making of the Afghan policy, the policy of the support of the Taliban was in fact conceived by Gen. (Retd.) Naseerullah Babar, the Interior Minister during the PPP regime (1993-1996). The Taliban policy was a civilian initiative possibly against the wishes of the ISI and the foreign office who wanted to continue the policy of seeking a broad-based settlement. However, the *Pushtun* element within the PPP, and later the military was able to push their way through to top echelon of power and succeeded in making it a Pakistan's policy with disastrous consequences for Afghanistan and Pakistan and the regional countries. It is surprising that the decision-makers overlooked the nature of Taliban's ideology, their social base, their implications for the Afghan society and their possible impact for Pakistan. Taliban's extremely narrow vision of Islam put them in clash with all the non-*Pushtun* minorities of the Afghan society pushing them into the arms of the foreign powers, stirred the wave of Talibanisation in the NWFP and Baluchistan leading to increasing conflict and violence in the Pakistani society and sent shockwaves in the regional countries, Iran, China, Russia and Central Asia republics.

Secondly, there appeared a lack of coordination at the decision-making level among the different bodies. Interior Ministry, Parliamentary Committee, the Political Parties and Different lobbies had their own agenda. The ISI and the Foreign Office had their own policies. The ISI remained divided and continued backing both Hikmatyar and Taliban till the fall of Kabul in 1996. Similarly the foreign office continued pursuing the policy of broad-based settlement through the UN till the fall of Kabul. Apparently the ISI and foreign office were late converts to the policy. There was not a single policy but in fact, multiple policies being pursued at the same time. The upshot of this analysis is that there must be a high level coordination committee which should

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formulate the policy and oversee its implementation.

Thirdly, there appeared to be little input of think tanks or research bodies into the making of such important decision. There are various government institutes like the Institute of Strategic Studies, Institute of Regional Studies and Research Cell of the Foreign Office but there does not appear to be any mechanism where their opinions and recommendations become the part of decision-making process.

Fourthly, parliamentary committee on foreign affairs must display a greater interest and vigour in debating the vital foreign policy issues. The members of the committee should invite both government officials and the relevant experts and seek their views on the foreign policy issues.

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17. See for the details: Ahmed Rashid (2001) and Micael Griffen (2001)
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19. See Ahmed Rashid (2001)
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21. See Ahmed Rashid (2001) P.90
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