Warlords and States:
The Neglected Total Spoiler Nexus
in Afghanistan

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There has been a succession of three overlapping wars in Afghanistan over the past 25 years. From 1979 to 1989, war was fought between the Mujahidin and Soviet troops; from 1989 to 1996 was a period of civil war during which warlords fought against each other for the control of country and its capital Kabul; finally, the last period of conflict corresponded to the rise to power of the Taliban in 1994, which met with the resistance of the Northern Alliance, and is concluded by the American intervention conducted to oust the Taliban following the attacks of 11 September 2001.

As a consequence of this continuous state of war, Afghanistan now faces overwhelming reconstructive challenges. The country's infrastructure has been nearly completely destroyed, some two million people have been killed, and another six million have become refugees, making Afghans the largest group of refugees in the world. Afghanistan's population is among the poorest in the world, it is regarded as the country most affected by landmines with about 10 million mines, and a state of 'lawlessness' prevails in most of the country.

This paper is concerned both with how the successive conflicts have been managed as well as with the peace-building process in Afghanistan. To date, there have been two peace-building processes in the country. The first is a result of the talks and negotiations initiated by the United Nations following the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979. In 1988, the Geneva Accord was signed and was to become the cornerstone of the reconstruction of the country. However, by 1992 this process had failed: following the collapse of the Najibullah government in 1992, echoing the collapse of its backer, the Soviet Union in 1991, different groups of Mujahidin fought against each other as they all attempted to gain control of Kabul. The situation became extremely volatile as the coalition of the Northern Alliance, composed principally of Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, fell to shambles as their troops fought around ethnic lines. Thereafter, whatever was left of the state finally collapsed and a deadly civil war followed allowing for the emergence of the Taliban.[1]

The second and current peace process is based on the Bonn Agreements signed on 5 December 2001. Currently, the United Nations, NGOs, and several states are leading efforts to attempt to build peace and security in Afghanistan.[2] The outcome of this peace process has yet to be seen. However, I argue that there is much to learn from the failure of peace processes to bring peace and security to Afghanistan embodied in the Geneva Accord. In this paper, I argue more specifically, that both peace processes fail to address two sets of relationships. The first links warlords inside of Afghanistan with states involved in the successive conflicts. The second exists between those states. There has been a conflation between the specific agenda of Afghan warlords who aimed to control the country and of the security agenda of the states in the region,

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[1] Rubin, Barnett R., *The search for peace in Afghanistan: from buffer state to failed state*, New Haven: Yale University Press, c1995, pp.125-145 in particular provides an excellent description of how the peace process collapsed and how the country felt into chaos. See also Giustozzi, Antonio, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, c2000, pp.232-250.
[2] A complete documentation by the UN on the current peace-building process in Afghanistan can be found at the following website:
http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=16&Body=Afghanistan&Body1=

which aimed to repress the influence of perceived enemies. To pursue this objective, states have been fighting each other by proxy by backing different groups combating for control of Afghanistan from within. It thus becomes necessary to take into account the major role that warlords and states that back them play in the potential success of peace-building and the reconstruction missions that take place in Afghanistan, and their respective roles as potential spoilers should not be underestimated.

While there are multiple causes that account for the failure of the peace process at the beginning of the 1990s and many actors that play an important role in the Afghan context, I will consider only the relationships between the governments of the states involved in supporting different factions within Afghanistan. The examination of the relationships between governments is important specifically because decisions around the support of these factions were made at the highest levels of government.

Muslim fundamentalism is at the centre of the wars in Afghanistan for two principal reasons. The first is the threat it poses to non-Muslim states. The second is the profound opposition that exists between Sunnis and Shias, which translates into a deep antagonism between the Sunni and Shia fighting groups in the country and into the equally intense antagonism between Sunni countries such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan on one hand, and Iran on the other. Therefore, I will focus my analysis on the relations that exist between Pakistan and India, Iran and Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United States, and finally the position of Russia.

I contend that there is a disconnect between what the diplomats and scholars analyzing the peace process know regarding the link between Afghan warlords and the states that sponsor them, and what they identify as being the major threats to peace and security in Afghanistan. For all the literature that has been written on the funding of the Mujahidin from the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan and the recent finger pointing at Pakistan for its support to the Taliban, there is a remarkable absence of any mention of the demonstrated backing of local factions by foreign states, let alone of its influence, in the major agreements that have been signed regarding the reconstruction of Afghanistan. This absence is all the more troublesome as it is hard to imagine that the diplomats involved in the peace-building process, and academics analyzing it, are not aware of the relationships between the different states involved in the conflict.

Several elements explain this disconnect, however, I would like to put forward two factors that I believe, are determinant in creating it. The first is the realization that the policies that would flow from understanding the impact that relationships between warlords and their states-sponsors and between these states have on the future of any peace process in Afghanistan are overwhelming. Indeed, in order to prevent each state from backing specific groups in Afghanistan, it would be necessary to address the long-standing and deeply entrenched antagonist relationships that exist between, for example, between Iran and the United States and between Pakistan and India. The complexity of such an enterprise might appear so great that it

might actually prevent scholars and diplomats from even considering it as a component of a peace-building process in Afghanistan.

The second factor is much more problematic. From the onset of the peace-building process the attitudes of its architects towards warlords has been ambiguous to say the least. Certainly the Bonn Agreement affirms that:

> Upon the official transfer of power, all mujahidin, Afghan armed forces and armed groups in the country shall come under the command and control of the Interim Authority, and be reorganized according to the requirements of the new Afghan security and armed forces,[3]

thus suggesting the need to deal with the issue of warlordism.[4] However, consider this extract from the preamble of the same document:

> The participants in the UN Talks on Afghanistan, In the presence of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan…*Expressing* their appreciation to the Afghan mujahidin who, over the years, have defended the independence, territorial integrity and national unity of the country and have played a major role in the struggle against terrorism and oppression, and whose sacrifice has now made them both heroes of jihad and champions of peace, stability and reconstruction of their beloved homeland, Afghanistan[.5]

An official document emanating from a conference held under the hospices of the UN as a well as major international powers – the United States in particular – manages to praise "heroes of jihad" less than three months after the attacks of September 11th. At the same time, combat against the Taliban was still going on (an achievement in itself). All of this should have triggered some interesting debate. However, in the context of this paper, what is rather appalling is the depiction of the Mujahidin as defenders of the territorial integrity of Afghanistan and as champions of peace and stability.

As I have mentioned before, it is very unlikely that diplomats were unaware of the fact that these same Mujahidin are the people who actually fought against each other during the civil war and who, in reference to their actions during this period, can be regarded as war criminals. Since it is reasonably possible to exclude naivete or misinformation as the reasons for such favourable portrayal, the most plausible explanation seems to be the desire not to offend the regional commanders – that is the warlords – who were supported by the United States during its campaign against the Taliban and helped it to fulfill US military objectives.[6]

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[3] United Nations Development Programme, *Agreement On Provisional Arrangements IN Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions*, 5 December 2001, (available online at www.undp.org/afghanistan/bonnagreement.html).
[4] See United States Institute of Peace, *Unfinished Business in Afghanistan: Warlordism, Reconstruction, and Ethnic Harmony*, Special Report 105, April 2003, (available online at http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr105.pdf), p.5.
[5] United Nations Development Programme, op. cit.
[6] Ibid.

This reflects, and is part of, a process of at least partial legitimization of the warlords. I suggest that this trend has two main consequences. The first is the expectable skepticism of the Afghan people both *vis-à-vis* the states and institutions that have contributed to putting the warlords back in the forefront, and the legitimacy of the Karzai government. The second result is the limitation of the understanding of which actors pose a threat to the peace-building process: warlords are to a certain extent, perceived as parts of the solution to the difficulties the country has to overcome. Subsequently, the fusion of the warlords' interests with those of the states that have, until now, armed, and financially and diplomatically supported them, is largely overlooked and seen as unproblematic. Logically, how the relationships between those states have influenced their support to factions inside of Afghanistan is taken into account even less.

This paper is divided into three parts. In the first, I define my understanding of security. In the second, I examine how the status of Afghanistan as a buffer state influences states backing warlords to become a kind of separate spoiler. Finally, I specify which states are the main actors in the Afghan conflict and I examine the relationships between these states and how they are linked with the groups fighting in Afghanistan.

I – The Definition of Security and of the Principal Threats to the Peace Process

The referent object when talking about security in Afghanistan should be the population. The concept of human security is much debated and Fen Hampson illustrates this well by describing three different understandings of this notion: 'rights-based,' 'safety of the people,' and 'human development.'[7] I will focus on state security. Two main motives inform this choice. For one thing the two successive peace-building processes that have been developed for Afghanistan evolved around the idea of building a strong state. This presupposes a realist understanding of security according to which the security of the people living in a state is ensured as long as the state itself is secure. Secondly, focusing on state security helps to understand why states have become involved in the conflict through their backing of different fighting groups.

I argue that the peace process anchored in the Bonn Agreement is threatened by two sets of different, but interconnected actors: warlords and the states that support them. In this regard, Stephen Stedman establishes a typology for spoilers, which is useful to consider. He distinguishes between three types of potential peace process spoilers: limited spoilers who have limited goals, greedy spoilers who have objectives that vary given calculations of cost and risk, and total spoilers who pursue total power and whose goals are not subject to change. For each spoiler, Stedman identifies a management strategy. Since total spoilers cannot be accommodated, they have to be either defeated or marginalized to the point they cannot do much damage. By comparison, a greedy spoiler can possibly be co-opted into a peace settlement if the

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[7] Hampson, Fen and al., *Madness in the Multitude: Human Security and the New Diplomacy*, Montreal And Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002, pp.17-33.

costs of war are sufficiently high and, meeting non-negotiable demands can accommodate a limited spoiler.[8]

According to Stedman, "some of the most powerful warlords are members of the Karzai government and, therefore, probably will not act as spoilers."[9] This observation suggests that warlords are potential greedy spoilers whose claim to power is satisfied by the position they have been given in an interim government. However, I contend that warlords are, in fact, total spoilers, who are able to act as such largely because their specific interests are matched with those of their sponsoring states. In addition to the material, financial, and diplomatic support they receive from states, warlords have been empowered by two other factors: international aid provided by the UN, NGOs, and states to the local populations under their rule; and the status and revenue gained from drug trafficking.

The international aid provided by the UN, NGOs, and states aimed at relieving the Afghani population helps to empower warlords in two ways: control of distribution gives warlords the opportunity to exert pressure, and provides a venue for corruption, etc.; secondly, through the 'securing' of aid convoys. Because roads are very dangerous due to the presence of mercenaries, warlords either escort convoys or ensure their safety in exchange for a 'commission.' Therefore, aid agency personnel is constantly forced to bargain with warlords in order to ensure that at least part of the aid is distributed to those it is aimed to help. The authority of warlords is thus somewhat legitimized and reinforced by the recognition of their status as necessary intermediaries.

In the case of drug trafficking, Afghanistan is currently the largest producer of poppies in the world and acts as international centre of trafficking for the drug. Through the money generated by this traffic, warlords have not only been able to buy large amounts of weaponry, but they are also able to bribe their potential opponents, creating volatile coalitions. This is important to keep in mind for three main reasons: drug trafficking itself represents a security threat to all societies it comes to affect; it underlines to a certain extent, the financial independence of warlords; and it give a glimpse at the interests at stake should actions be taken against the warlords. With some 3,700 tons of poppies produced in 2002 for example, the revenues generated by this traffic can be expected to amount to billions of US dollars.[10] The highest attention should be paid to this specific point as it highlights prospective new threats to a

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[8] Stedman, Stephen J., "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes" *International Security*, vol. 22, no. 2, Fall 1997 (see pp.10-11 for a description of the types of spoilers and pp.14-16 for strategies matching the kind of spoilers).

[9] Quoted in Trei Lisa, "Afghanistan Faces Hard Road in Rebuilding a Viable State, experts say," *Standford Report*, 28 January 2002 (available online at http://news-service.stanford.edu/news/january30/afghanpanel-130.html).

[10] In Durch, William J., "Afghanistan: Keeping the Peace Without Hardly Trying," 26 November 2002, p.10 (available online at www.stimson.org/fopo/pdf/Afghan_KeepingPeaceWithoutTryingrev112602.pfd).

still very young and fragile Afghan state. Over the long term, warlords could also wage war against each other, not in order to control capital, but to control cartels.[11]

States supporting warlords constitute the second set of actors that can potentially spoil the current peace-building process. Since I am going to examine the nature of the relationship between these states in a subsequent part in more detail, I want to now focus on understanding why a large a number of states have found a particular interest in backing different local factions fighting in Afghanistan for control of the state. Afghanistan's geopolitical location is significant at this juncture. The country is bordered directly by Iran, Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Russia and India are other close neighbours. In recent history, Afghanistan was regarded as a buffer between major powers, whether it was between the British and Russian empires or the Soviet Union and Pakistan (at the time backed by the United States). Because of this specific status, the control exerted directly (as in the case of the Soviet intervention) or indirectly (as in the case of the Pakistani support for the Taliban) over Afghanistan by one or more of its neighbouring states has been perceived as a security threat by the states that were not exerting such control.[12] While similar situations have often led to a direct conflict between the controlling state and the others, in the context of Afghanistan, such direct involvement (i.e., military intervention), by regional states has always been avoided and the Soviet experience represents a great reminder of the reasons why.

Such direct intervention has always been shunned as there has been a clear, prevalent sense between the states playing a major role in the region that if that was to be the case, the conflict would quickly degenerate and escalate through a domino effect.[13] Over the past twenty-five years, there have been at least two events that could have led to such a situation. The first was the assassination of the American ambassador in Afghanistan by a communist group in 1979 , which 'only' led to the closing of the American embassy in Kabul.[14] The second more recent and more serious event was provoked by the assassination of eight Iranian diplomats by

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[11] On this issue, see Olcott, Martha Brill, "Afghan Drug Trade: Terror in the Wings," 22 April 2002 (available online at http://www.ceip.org/files/Publications/2002-04-22-olcott-csm.asp?from=pubauthor); and Olcott, Martha Brill, "Drugs, Terrorism, and Regional Security: The Risk from Afghanistan," *Testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee of Technology, Terrorism and Government Operations,* 13 March 2002, (available online at http://www.ceip.org/files/Publications/OlcottTestimony031302.asp?from=pubauthor)*.* Also of great interest is Cooley, John K., *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, London; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002, pp.105-134 (ch.7, "Poppy Fields, Killing Fields and Druglords").
[12] On the topic of buffer state, see Rubin, Barnett R., op. cit., pp.16-18. See also Greenfield Partem, Michael, "The Buffer System in International Relations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 27, no. 1, March 1983, pp.10-11. Greenfield underlines that "states…pay attention to the buffer state only insomuch as it represents a geographic space." He illustrates this point with the preoccupation by the United States about Cambodia not being used as a based during the Vietnam War.
[13] This event is noted, among other authors, by Maley, William, *The Afghanistan Wars*, New York: Palgrave, 2002, p.32.
[14] Here I am slightly modifying the argument made by the authors of the volume *The Responsibility to Protect*. As their argument for a precautionary principle applies to humanitarian interventions, I use it similarly for my case; thus intervention suggests a military intervention.

the Taliban in 1998. In response, Iran threatened to go to war against the Taliban and consequently amassed 250,000 troops at its border with Afghanistan. War between Iran and Afghanistan was prevented thanks to the negotiating efforts of the UN and Russia directed at Iran. These efforts were matched by American pressures on Pakistan to stop providing support to the Taliban. Pakistan was, at the time, more and more directly involved with the Taliban as an increasing number of Pakistani military officers were present in Afghanistan to advise the Taliban in their operations against the Northern Alliance.[15]

II – Which States are Involved in the Conflict?
To be able to identify which states are involved in the Afghan conflict, it is necessary to define the region in which this conflict is taking place. While geography is definitely a major element that defines a region, it might also pose an important limit on our understanding of which actors are playing a role in this specific area. Emanuel Adler argues that "regions are…systems of meaning…they are made up of people…who are actively involved in the political life of an (international and transnational) region and engaged in the pursuit of regional purposes."[16] Patrick Morgan notes that "the location [of a region] is where the security relationships of consequence exist; the members are states that participate profoundly in those relationships."[17]

These two characterizations of what constitutes a region allow us to consider the whole range of states that, without being directly located on the borders of Afghanistan, have nonetheless been key actors in the wars that have taken place for more than two decades in the country. For the purpose of this paper, I will consider the relationships between the following states: Russia, the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, India, and China.[18]

The peace-building and state-building processes in Afghanistan are threatened by the fusion between the interests of 'internal' actors (the warlords) and 'external' actors (the states supporting these warlords). To expose more clearly how this fusion of interests came to play a major role in the perpetuation of the war and in the failure of the first peace process, I will start by examining the relationship between Pakistan and India as it represents a case study as to how

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[15] On this event see Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: Crisis of Impunity, The Role of Pakistan, Russia, and Iran in Fueling the Civil War*, vol. 13, no. 3, July 2001 (available online at http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/afghan2/), p.27; and Rashid, Amhed, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, c2000, p.76.

[16] Adler, Emanuel, "Imagined (Security) Communities: Cognitive Regions in International Relations," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2, p.253.

[17] Morgan, Patrick M., "Regional Security Complexes and Regional Orders," in David A. Blake and Patrick M. Morgan, *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, University Park (Pennsylvania): Pennsylvania University Press, 1997, p.30.

[18] While I could have included Turkey because of its link with Uzbek and Turkmen groups, I have chosen not to largely because its role in the conflict has been far less significant. However, Turkey cannot be dismissed as a lesser actor in the broader context of Central Asia as its relationships, especially with Russia and Iran, should to be considered.

conflict existing between two states has led one of them to actively support groups inside of Afghanistan. I will then consider the relationship between Iran and the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia-United States nexus and the impact of those countries' backing of different Afghan factions. Finally, I will look at the positions adopted by Russia, China, and the Central Asian states.

Pakistan and India

Acrimonious relationships between Pakistan and India have existed ever since their independence in 1947. For example, Indian elites formed the Congress Party (India's largest party) specifically to oppose the creation of Pakistan.

Pakistan's stance *vis-à-vis* India is, as it is to be expected, related to the constant concerns it expressed towards the treatment of Muslim minorities in India. While this has always constituted a major element of the Pakistani-Indian relationship, Pakistan worries have become more acute with the arrival of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power in India at the beginning of the 1990s. The BJP's discourses and policies are based on the idea of Hindutva, which defends a strong and militant Hindu nationalism and which claims that most of the problems India has been facing are due to the domination of the Hindu population by colonialist powers such as the British and the Muslims.

Another point of resentment between the two countries was created by the military support given to the secession forces of East Pakistan by India. It was through these means that India played a major role in the creation of Bangladesh.[19] This issue has to be understood in the context of the cohesion, and by extension, of the survival, of the Pakistani state. Separatist movements, especially in the Baluch and Sindh provinces, and to a lesser extent in the North West Frontier Province, have been of concern to successive Pakistani governments. It is therefore easier to understand why Pakistan has been angered by India's position, as it threatens Pakistan's stability as well as its very existence.

This feeling is finally reinforced by the contention over Kashmir, which is at the core of and has consistently sustained the bad relationship between India and Pakistan. Following the cease-fire concluded under UN auspices, Kashmir was divided into two areas, and in 1949 a UN resolution provided for a plebiscite to be held on the issue of self-determination. However, both countries went to war for a second time in 1965 because India refused to comply with this resolution.[20] Another cease-fire was signed in 1966, but violence has constantly existed since then. India has always accused Pakistan of supporting terrorist groups fighting Indian military forces; a claim that is not without foundations.

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[19] See Jones, Owen Bennett, op. cit., pp.146-186.
[20] Blood, Peter R., *Pakistan: A Country Study*, Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995, p.244-45. For a more complete account of the issue of Kashmir, see Jones, Owen Bennett, op. cit., pp.56-108.

It is particularly in connection to this issue that Pakistan's support to warlords in Afghanistan has to be considered. During the war against the Soviet Union, Pakistan, through the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI), directed military and financial aid to a group of seven Mujahidin parties, all dominated by Pushtun. The more radical of these groups, the *Hisb-e-Islami* of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, was especially favoured. More recently and perhaps more importantly, the ISI has been at the centre of the Taliban movement. This can be explained in part by the opportunity for Pakistan to establish trade relations with the newly independent Central Asian states. But it is essentially Pakistan's relationship with India that has provided support to the Taliban. Pakistan has constantly encouraged a large number of radical fundamentalist groups in Afghanistan that it funded to go to fight in Kashmir against the Indian government. This is especially the case after 1989 since the defeat of the Soviet Union. Tahir Mohiudin notes that "some have believed that it was going to be possible to repeat in Kashmir against India what the Mujahidin had accomplished in their country."[21] An increasing number of non-local fighters have been observed in Kashmir, and Pakistani religious leaders are preaching for the liberation of Kashmir as part of their plan for the destruction of India.

Pakistan's support to extremist Islamic groups in Afghanistan has however, not been developed only as a way to add pressure to the Indian government though indirectly controlling the regime in power in Kabul and having people trained in Afghanistan fight in Kashmir. The backing of these Islamic groups should also be considered in the context of Pakistan's relationship with Iran. In this respect, the connection that has long existed between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States needs to be underlined even though the sources of antagonism of each of these countries *vis-à-vis* Iran are somewhat different.

The Pakistani-Saudi-American Nexus and Iran

In Iran's relationships with both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, each country is suspicious of the other. In each relationship tensions between the two states originate from two strikingly similar sources.

The first main point of friction is due to differing views on regional security. Iran considers the security of the region as a problem that should be solved between local states, thus excluding outsiders. In contrast, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are in favour of the presence of outside powers in order to balance different rivalries in their respective regions: the Persian Gulf and Southwest Asia. Consequently, Saudi Arabia has allowed American troops to be stationed on its territory, while Iran has adopted an independent stance and has insisted on the development of a national defence industry.[22] Until recently, there was no official American

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[21] In Paringaux, Roland-Pierre, "Convoitises sur le Cachemire," *Le Monde Diplomatique: Manière de voir no. 67: L'Empire contre l'Irak*, January-February 2003, p.63.
[22] Chubin, Sharam, *Whither Iran? Reform, Domestic Politics and National Security*, Adelphi Paper no. 342, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p.42.

military presence in Pakistan, even though in the middle of the 1980s there were talks about such a possibility. American troops would have used air bases in the province of Baluchistan, located on the border with Iran, as well as port facilities in Karachi.[23]

More importantly however, is the nature of Muslim fundamentalism in each country. Iran is a Shia country while the populations of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have Sunni majorities. In each case, the historical antagonism between Sunni and Shia confessions of Islam plays a central role in the antipathy Saudia Arabia and Pakistan feel towards Iran. It should not be forgotten that Sunni Muslims regard Shias as infidels. This vindicates the support the Iranian regime has brought to Shias who have represented an important part of the populations of Persian Gulf countries and who have had many grievances against the regimes for discrimination – Saudi Arabia included. It also accounts in part for Pakistani treatment of its Shia minority and the resentment of the Iranian regime on this issue.[24] Finally, it contributes to explaining the harsh criticisms Iran has formulated against Pakistani policies regarding Afghanistan and the Taliban. It is the Taliban that has specifically targeted the Hazara populations because of their Shia confession.

Iran versus Saudi Arabia and Iran versus Pakistan have been played out inside of Afghanistan through support to different groups. Ever since the invasion of the country by the Soviet Union in December 1979 and the resistance it generated, this support has essentially been influenced by ethnic affinity based on religion and language between clients (the warlords) and their patrons.[25] Both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have systematically favoured the most radical Sunni fundamentalist groups over the different periods of conflict that have plagued Afghanistan.

As I have mentioned before, Pakistan has especially funded groups dominated by Pushtun. During the war opposing the Soviet troops to the Mujahidin, the Saudis favoured the *Ittehad-e-Islami Afghanistan* led by Abdul Sayaf (now operating in the Philippines), a fluent Arabic speaker and former professor of theology at Kabul University. In addition, Saudi Arabia has played no small role in the rise and rule of the Taliban. In practice, it was the main financial supporter of the Taliban. While it is true that an increasing amount of funding was received through private donations, the direct involvement of the Saudi government should not be underestimated. For example Prince Turki al-Faisal Saud, the chief of the Saudi General

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[23] Rezun, Miron, op. cit, p.23. With respect to the Pakistani-American relationship, The Iranian regime has dubbed the Pakistan "creature of the Great Satan," an expression that reflects the view that Pakistan is a tool of the United States' interests and thus represents a threat to the security of Iran (Ibid.)

[24] Rezun, Miron, op. cit, p.73.

[25] I refer here to the idea of affinity link presented by Premdas, Ralph R., "The Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict: Some Theoretical Explorations," in K.M. de Silva and R.J. May, *Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict*, London: Pinter and International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1991, especially p.12 and pp.16-17.

Intelligence Agency, made several trips to Pakistan and Afghanistan, each of which was followed by a reinforcement of the Taliban's capabilities.[26]

The Iranian government has consistently funded groups that were led by Hazaras and to a lesser degree Tajiks (while only the first ones are of Shia confession, both speak Farsi related languages).[27] More specifically, during the war against the Soviet Union, Iran supported a coalition of eight Shia groups led by the *Hizb-I-Wahdat* based in the Hazarajat region in central Afghanistan.[28] Teheran has directed its assistance to various factions, especially the *Hizb-I-Wahdat* and General Dostum's forces-mostly Uzbek, composing the Northern Alliance, thus contributing in part to its fragmentation.[29]

Given that Afghanistan is as buffer state, control of the country by another state is seen as a security threat to all neighbouring states. In this perspective, the interactions between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and warlords inside of Afghanistan are significant for Iran to the extent that they have made for its encirclement by very hostile, militant, and more numerous forces. This perception has been reinforced by the central role the United States has played in conjunction with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

Iran and the United States

The relationship between Iran and the United States has been highly confrontational since the Islamic revolution, particularly the storming of the US embassy in Teheran and the seizure of several hostages on 4 November 1979. Since then, their respective policies are of mutual demonization. US policy in particular is focused on the isolation of Iran in the international scene.[30] While the Iranian regime has labeled the United States as 'Great Satan' and as a bully, the United States has defined Iran as 'a barbaric nation,' a rogue state, and most recently a member of the so-called 'axis of evil.' The Clinton administration in particular has been strongly opposed to Iran. This is demonstrated through the US policy of dual containment (the other state targeted is Iraq).[31] A central point of this policy is its focus on the threat posed by Iranian Islamic fundamentalism, support of international terrorism, and the attempts made by the Iranian regime to acquire weapons of mass destruction.[32]

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[26] Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: Crisis of Impunity, The Role of Pakistan, Russia, and Iran in Fueling the Civil War*, vol. 13, no. 3, July 2001 (available online at http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/afghan2/), pp.31-32.

[27] For a summary of this, see Marsden, Peter, *The Taliban: War and Religion in Afghanistan*, London; New York: Zed Books, 2002, pp.29-35.

[28] See Cooley, John K., op. cit., p.49.

[29] Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p.36.

[30] On the topic of demonisation, see Beeman, William O., "Double Demons: Cultural Impedance in U.S.-Iranian Understanding" in Rezun, Miron, op. cit, pp.165-179.

[31] The policy's purpose is to economically strangle and to isolate the Iranian and Iraqi regimes in the hope that they will either collapse or modify their behaviour. The policy is inspired by what is perceived as the success of a similar policy toward the Soviet Union.

[32] On these, see Tarock, Adam, op. cit., pp.43-50.

The Iranian regime's negative perception of the United States comes in part from the American involvement in raising the Shah to power in 1953.[33] This memory has led Iran to fear new attempts by the US to conduct similar actions. In addition, there have been a series of developments that have come to strengthen Iranian distrust of America. For example, the US Navy intervened several times in favour of Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war (not to mention the technical and material aid it provided to Saddam Hussein's regime), and the destruction by the US cruiser Vincennes of a civilian Iranian airliner in July 1988. The United States has strongly, discursively, and concretely opposed the Iranian government ever since the revolution took place in 1979.

The United States was one the major donors to the Mujahidin during the war in Afghanistan. Aside from large amounts of money, US aid consisted notably of sophisticated weaponry – the best known of which is the Stinger Missiles – and diplomatic support. One of the particularities of this aid is that it was channeled through the Pakistani ISI, thus ending up in the hands of the groups favoured by Pakistan.

What is remarkable is the fact that the specific interests of the United States both with respect to Iran and the Soviet Union, have acted as the catalyst for the consolidation of US relations with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and subsequently specific warlords inside of Afghanistan given that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have essentially supported Sunni fundamentalist groups. The American government's objective to contain both the Soviet Union and Iran, fussed with those of Islamabad and Ryad, facilitated their realization and gave them a much more important dimension.

Regarding the period corresponding to the rule of the Taliban, there is no evidence that the US has materially and financially supported the group. Until the momentum gained by the issue of women's rights raised by feminist groups in 1996, the Clinton administration was silent about the Taliban regime and regarded the Taliban as a pillar of stability in the country.[34] I would further suggest that one reason for this silence is that the presence of an extremist Sunni regime in Afghanistan actually helped the Clinton administration's policy of containment of Iran.

Russia and Militant Islam

The Soviet Union and, after its collapse, Russia has always been very apprehensive of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism on its southern borders as it has always constituted a very serious security threat. Soviet authorities were extremely worried about the possible repercussions of the Iranian revolution on its Central Asian republics, given fears that they could have led to the disintegration of the states. However, while Russia's relationship with Iran was rather tense during the 1980s, the relationship can be regarded as one of accommodation and collaboration

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[33] Tarock, Adam, op. cit., p.49; and Rezun, Miron, op. cit, p.170.
[34] Rashid, Amhed, op. cit., p.176.

throughout the 1990s. Russia has notably helped Iran to develop its civilian nuclear program. Both have also been cooperating to bring some stability to the Caucasus and Central Asia.

In contrast, the Soviet and Russian relationships with Pakistan have been consistently marked by suspicion, distrust, and criticism. Moscow was particularly angered at the role played by Islamabad in funding and providing military and technical aid to the Mujahidin during its intervention in Afghanistan. Not surprisingly, the Soviet Union's position during the negotiations that were to lead to the signature of the Geneva Accord evolved around the ending of "outside interference."[35]

During the 1990s, the relationship between Russia and Pakistan has followed the same course. Russia has been very critical of Pakistan's role in the Taliban's accent to power and the continuous support Pakistan has given the regime ever since. The presence of non-local combatants who were trained in Afghanistan under the 'guidance' of the Taliban in Chechnya, is of special concern to Russia. The proximity of the Taliban at the border with Uzbekistan was another source of worry. This later development led Moscow to announce that it was ready to take military action to protect the borders of the CIS states.[36] Consequently, while expressing its condemnation at the role played by Pakistan in helping the Taliban, Russia backed the groups inside Afghanistan that were fighting against the Taliban. Russia has provided logistical and military material to the Northern Alliance and more particularly to Ahmed Shah Massoud's troops.[37]

The Position of China and of the Central Asian States

China has traditionally been a close ally of Pakistan, in part because of the contribution of Islamabad in the rapprochement of Beijing during the 1970s, and in part because of China's interest in containing the influence of India. One of the major elements of this alliance has been the help given to Pakistan by China in developing its military programs and more specifically, its nuclear program. However, in recent years, Chinese authorities have kept their distance from Pakistan mainly because, in this instance again, the support that the latter has given to the Taliban has contributed to the revival and the intensification of the revolt, fueled by extremist Islamic groups, of the Muslim Uygur populations in the Xinjiang province. Central Asian states and their leaders in particular, have been very concerned by the prospect of fundamentalism spreading to form the backbone of new opposition groups. Partially in response to this perceived common threat to their security, Russia, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 1996. One of the declared objectives of this organization is to facilitate collaboration between its members in order to

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[35] In Kux, Dennis, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, c2001, p.264.
[36] Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p.43.
[37] Ibid.

contain the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the region. While the role of the Central Asian republics was aligned with the Soviet Union during the first period of the wars in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989, the new states have globally adopted a policy of containment with regard to the influence of the Taliban in the region.[38] Their own limited resources prevent Central Asian states from giving significant financial or military aid to the groups fighting against the Taliban. However, they have acted as 'facilitators' for assistance provided by Russia and Iran to Northern Alliance forces.[39]

Conclusion

Relations between several of the states involved in the conflict in Afghanistan have been antagonistic. The fact that alliances have been made between states to contain what they perceive as a common enemy, needs to be emphasized. For example, during the entire period from 1979 to 2001, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United States joined efforts to limit Iran's influence. This translated within Afghanistan into their respective support to different factions led by warlords influenced by religious and linguistic affinities. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, with the tacit approval of the United States, backed Sunni fighting groups, while Iran helped primarily Shia groups. The security of Russia, Iran, India, China, and the Central Asian states has been threatened by the increasing presence of combatants trained in Afghanistan under Taliban rule within their territories. In response, these countries all came to help the different groups assembled under the Northern Alliance fighting against the Taliban diplomatically, and in some cases financially and militarily as well.

The different sets of rivalries between states have to be put in the context of the opposition between various groups led by warlords that have been fighting for power inside Afghanistan. Using Stedman's model of spoilers, it is possible to define the warlords as total spoilers. Three factors come to support this characterization. Firstly, in light of the warlord's fierce fighting against one another for the control of the capital after the collapse of the Najibullah regime, and the level of distrust that exists between warlords, it is unlikely that their ambitions will be satisfied with only a share of power in the new government. Secondly, the interests of the warlords will probably conflict with those of the Karzai government. Drug trafficking is providing warlords with large financial resources that could support another conflict should the government decide to act against them. Finally the conflation that has existed so far between the warlords' specific interests and those of the states backing them, have allowed the warlords to have access to a continuous supply of weaponry throughout the conflict. While this external support is not the only element that needs to be taken into account if the

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[38] A good comment on this organization can be found in Yom, Sean L."The Future of the Shangai Cooperation Organization," *Harvard Asia Quartlerly*, available online at http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~asiactr/haq/200204/0204a003.htm. A copy of the declaration can be found at http://chinaembassy.org.tr/eng/25326.html.
[39] On the role of the Central Asian states, see especially *Human Rights Watch*, op. cit., pp.45-49.

threat that warlords pose to security is to be resolved, dealing with the factors motivating such support would strongly limit their capacity.

Sponsoring states have to be understood as greedy spoilers of the peace processes undertaken in Afghanistan. Efforts should thus focus on strategies that would lead to their co-optation. It then becomes essential that contentious relationships between states be incorporated into any peace-process that attempts to address conflict in Afghanistan; this is something that was not embodied in the Geneva Accord nor articulated in the Bonn Agreements. In particular, there should be serious attempts to resolve two sets of highly contentious relationships: that existing between Iran and the United States and the one between Pakistan and India. If this were the case, a cautious optimism could be applied to the talks held between the two later states over the issue of Kashmir. In sharp contrast, the quagmire the US seems to find itself in in Iraq, and in particular its difficult position towards the Iraqi Shia population, as well as how Iran could come to influence the whole situation, is a source of renewed concern.

The failure to integrate the reality of the support of states to local factions into the peace process will likely create an incentive for such states to attempt to exert their influence over Afghanistan once more. Subsequently, it could lead to further strengthening of the warlords – or at least a particular group of them: warlords who have been associated with the Taliban have clearly enjoyed less support from the United States than those linked with the Northern Alliance since the end of 2001. The configuration of the links between states, their relationships with each other, and their backing of specific groups inside Afghanistan, leaves plenty of room for imagining how states could be tempted to settle old accounts with old enemies should the occasion and opportunity arise. There are plenty of motives to do so and the opportunities might well present themselves. In any case, the result will be that the peace-building process will again fail to bring peace and security to Afghanistan.

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