

## BOOK REVIEW

### AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE: PAKISTAN AND THE TALIBAN

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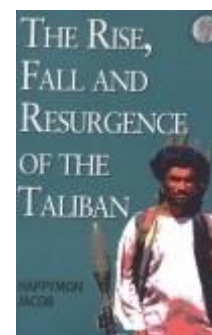
#### **The Rise, Fall and Resurgence of the Taliban**

Happymon Jacob

Sanskriti Publishers

Pages: 137

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**T**he War on Terrorism led by the US forces against Afghanistan forced the Taliban to flee the country in December 2001. A pro-US government was established in Kabul under President Hamid Karzai in 2002. Despite being in power for three years, the Karzai government has been unable to stop the increasing violence. This has forced many developmental agencies like the Red Cross to quit the country. It has also put a halt to development and reconstruction programs. Has the Taliban reared its head once again? Is Pakistan in its pursuit of carving out a sphere of influence within the Afghan power structure, providing it active support? The book makes an attempt to throw light on these issues.

The Rise, Fall and Resurgence of the Taliban focuses on the events preceding the rise of the Taliban; the reasons for its emergence as a power group; the special relationship it shares with Pakistan and the financial backing it receives within the Islamic world. The subsequent fall out with Pakistan in the face of persistent US pressure, post September 11, 2001, and the strong connections it established with the different institutional mechanisms within Pakistan has been analysed in a detailed manner. The book also analyses the resurgence of the Taliban masterminded by Pakistan's internal and geo strategic compulsions and their growing influence in the south of Afghanistan. The author has provided a factual sequence of events which has, according to him, led to this resurgence. Although there is persistent violence in the country and reports of the Taliban gaining ground in the south, it might be too early to characterize it as a resurgence. Crucially, it has regained influence only in those areas which were considered its strongholds even earlier.

Some vital questions need to be specially focused on, which has been discussed by Happy Jacob. Does the Karzai government have a soft corner for the Taliban? (pg: 52). This is not clear as the government is desperate to stop the continuous cycle of violence in and around Kabul. It has been forced to adopt this strategy in order to effectively deal with the growing control of the Taliban in the south of Afghanistan. Amid reports of differences between the moderate and radical elements of the Taliban, the Karzai government is smartly trying to wean away the moderates from the extremists. Thus the strategy is born out of practical compulsions rather than any soft corner within the government.

Second, is there a contradiction in describing the US role in the rise of the Taliban? How did the Bush Administration follow an indifferent policy towards Afghanistan in the early 1990's when it continued with its obsession for oil in the country? (pg: 36) The Bush Administration was certainly preoccupied with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Berlin crisis yet it never consciously adopted an indifferent policy towards Afghanistan. It was aware of the energy resources in Afghanistan even in the 1980's while providing active support in the War against Soviet occupation.

There are other important questions. Was strategic depth in its policy a strategic interest for Pakistan in Afghanistan? (pg: 40). No, it is one of the limitations of Pakistan's policy. Did the US attack Afghanistan only because of the Taliban - al Qaeda alliance as the author explains? (pg: 76). Yes,

this was a primary reason along with other important factors such as the availability of energy resources and an intention to stop Russia and Iran's influence to grow in the region.

Are anarchy and Pakistan's initiatives, according to the author, the two major reasons for the rise of the Taliban? Infact, the major reason for anarchy was that Afghanistan became a strategic battleground for various countries like Pakistan and the US. It was one of the consequences of Pakistan's initiatives in the country. Hence, it can not be seen as a factor apart from Pakistan's initiatives.

The narrative could have been rephrased to make it appear more lucid and flowing. There are certain portions in the first half of the book that could have been slotted in a more systematic manner. (pg: 35-39) This would have ensured continuity in description. There are arguments that appear contradictory; for example, while describing 'why Pakistan financially engineered victories for the Taliban (pg: 24), while 'on the other hand wanting the conflict within Afghanistan to boil continuously' (pg: 45).

The subject undoubtedly is the most important for the security of the region. An important contribution from an Indian perspective. It would be even more useful, if the book also provide a more detailed analysis on how Pakistan, despite its own economic problems, managed to support the Taliban financially and militarily for close to a decade? Was money from the narcotics trade sufficient to ensure Pakistan's support or was there coordination between Pakistan and other financial donors like Saudi Arabia? Similarly, the reasons for the sudden fallout between Pakistan and Taliban, leading to the down fall of the latter by 2001 and finally India's role in the conflict in depth. Perhaps, Happy Jacob would like to look into these if he plans to revise this book, which has adequate information to benefit students and academicians specialising on the region.

Here the insurgency and the drugs barons appear to have made an unholy alliance. When The Independent visited the drugs heartlands of north Helmand in May, local poppy farmers explained that the Taliban had promised to protect their poppy fields, whilst taking a tax on the opium produced. Senior Nato officers have warned that millionaire drug smugglers are also funding the insurgents and have expressed concern that the threat to the poppy economy in the south is pushing the local populace into the camp of the Taliban. Some military figures have suggested an amnesty on poppy eradication for a y An Unholy Alliance. Take the Small Scroll to Varimathras in the Undercity. Small Scroll (Provided).  
You know very well what it is we are offering. The opportunity for you to take the Barrens and the lands beyond is a great one. We simply want your aid in return. By aid we mean nothing more than your giving us the freedom to take action in the area. Many Taliban carry Pakistani identity cards, as they spent years in refugee camps in Pakistan, and thousands voted in the 1997 elections in Balochistan for their favourite Pakistani party - the Jamiat-e-Ulema-i-Islam (JUI). Moreover the Taliban recruited hundreds of Pakistani Islamic fundamentalist students to fight for their cause and were closely linked to Pakistan's fundamentalist Islamic parties such as the JUI led by Maulana Fazlur Rahman.  
After 1992, Pakistan continued to back Hekmatyar, first in his refusal to legitimise the Kabul regime and then his strategic alliance with General Rashid Dostum in 1993, that led to the bloody two-year-long assault on Kabul which virtually destroyed the city.