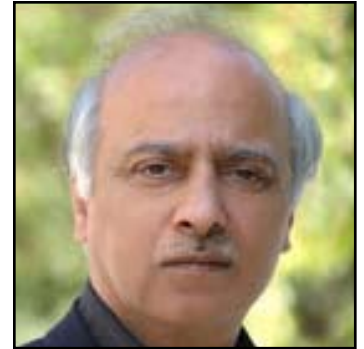

Pakistan's Reverse Revolution

Imtiaz Gul

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution in 1979 marked the beginning of a painful journey for Pakistan that has culminated in a reverse socio-political revolution on two counts. First, instead of reaping rich dividends from a partnership with the United States that engineered the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, Pakistan today faces its gravest security challenge, as some of the forces with which it had partnered to defeat the Soviets and later used to force the Indians out of Kashmir are biting back. Second, post-revolutionary Iran's expanding cultural presence and influence engendered a Saudi Salafist counter-reaction, thereby turning Pakistan into a battleground for a Saudi-Iranian proxy war which sowed the seeds of sectarian acrimony and violence between the country's minority Shi'a and majority Sunni populations.



Imtiaz Gul, Chairman, Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), Islamabad.

Although the questionable “War against Terrorism” unleashed in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks by the US-led coalition introduced a different dynamic into Pakistan's political landscape, the genesis of the reaction to this war clearly lies in the Afghan *jihad* that the United States had led and funded to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan. That *jihad* gave birth to a new generation of anti-Western warriors — *jihadists* inspired by Usama bin Ladin and his deputy, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Some of them denounce Pakistan as a US collaborator, which they then use to justify their “*jihad*” against organs of the Pakistani state, particularly the security apparatus comprising the army, police, and the intelligence services.

Ironically, following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan had a ready-made fighting force in the form of the *mujahidin* — Afghan as well as local. Pakistan also had a ready-made champion of this fighting force — the Pakistani military, which thought that the *mujahidin* could be useful for engineering Kashmir's separation from India, either through a militant struggle or a UN-led plebiscite. The ensuing nexus between Kashmiri Muslims who wanted independence from New Delhi and Pakistan's intelligence outfits proved to be disastrous. From mid-1988 onward, relations with India deteriorated. During the mid- and late 1990s, Pakistani military institutions actively supported Kashmiri separatist groups, using Afghanistan, which was ruled by the obscurantist Taliban regime, as a training ground. The Pakistani establishment considered this effort to be a masterful, cost-effective tactical maneuver. But the strategic consequences of this policy were disastrous.

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Forced into international isolation and hamstrung by a mighty military establishment whose strength was rooted in the Afghan *jihad* of the 1980s, none of the four civilian governments in the 1990s could turn Pakistan's foreign policy around, particularly its India and Afghanistan policy. When in 1999 then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attempted to open up to India, the army undercut the move in May of that year by moving into the Indian part of Kashmir and occupying the strategic heights of Kargil. This revived the acrimony between India and Pakistan, and sowed discord between Sharif and then-Chief of Army Staff General Pervez Musharraf.

Mired in the Kashmir-centric policy and given to the idea of "*jihad*" there, Musharraf, who came to power in a bloodless coup in 1999, became an international pariah. Following the 9/11 attacks, however, Musharraf's fortunes turned; he went on to become one of the most sought-after heads of state by virtue of Pakistan's emergence as the central front in the US-led effort to wage a successful war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

Thus, much of the recent and current turmoil in the country has roots in the seismic events of 1979 and policies taken in response to them. This turmoil is as tragic as it is worrisome. Since January 2008, Pakistan, 75% of whose 170 million inhabitants live on less than two dollars a day, has been rocked by 110 suicide bombings conducted by groups opposed to NATO's presence in Afghanistan. During this period, hundreds of explosions and ambushes have taken close to 2,000 lives. In fact, in April 2009 things had turned so ugly that the international community began talking and thinking aloud of "Pakistan's disintegration in the face of mounting Islamist insurgency — the mortal threat." Since early May 2009, the military operations in Pakistan's border regions against some of the remnants of the Afghan *Jihad* have resulted in the displacement of nearly 2.5 million people.

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Besides the army, the United States has been the other common element that has influenced Pakistan's political development in the last three decades. In Iran, Americans retreated, while in Afghanistan, Americans mounted a methodical proxy war. In both of these American foreign policy experiments, Pakistan served as the laboratory. While the Americans left Pakistan to its own devices after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in February 1989, the Bush Administration lapped up Pakistan soon after 9/11 — but this time with a few words of regret and expression of determination never again to leave the country in a lurch. In May 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also apologized for what the Americans had done to Pakistan in the late 1990s. Pakistanis have been bearing the brunt of "incoherent US policies for the past 30 years," Clinton admitted. Although Pakistan's numerous problems prompted former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright to refer to Pakistan as the "global migraine" in December 2008, President Barack Obama promises to cure the country of all its ills. So do other international figures, such as British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Unlike in the past when these nations extended unquestioned support to military dictators, this time they seem to be following a two-track policy: supporting the military in counter-insurgency on the one hand, and standing behind the civilian government on the other.

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But the damage inflicted upon Pakistan will be difficult to repair. The tumultuous year of 1979 began a long, painful, and destructive period for the country. The US practice of expediency combined with the self-serving policies of Pakistan's military dictators increased the state's reliance on extremist non-state actors who are now eating into the very vitals of the state of Pakistan. Unless neutralized — a task that will be neither quick nor easy to accomplish — these groups will continue to threaten the peace and stability not only of Pakistan but of the entire region.