

Why Pakistan is happy to pay a heavy price this time for strategic depth in Afghanistan

For the first time in over 75 years not only are there no Indian advisors in Afghanistan, there are now Pakistani advisors in their stead. This alone may be worth the price that Pakistan will continue to pay for its victory in Afghanistan

C Christine Fair January 24, 2022 11:22:14 IST

For the first time in 20 years, Pakistan believes it has a friendly government in Kabul. All of the pesky nuisances — such as the United States and India — have been vanquished and their embassies shuttered, while the embassies of Pakistan, China and Russia (Pakistan's newest ally) remain open for business. That business is not salubrious for the international community or most importantly for Afghans. This has come at a steep price: Pakistan's own Tehreek-e-Taliban-Pakistan has been revived within Pakistan. Yet, more Afghans are trying to flee the brutality of Pakistan's puppet regime and Pakistan is the only option as the international efforts to evacuate Afghans have wrapped up. And the Taliban — just like every other regime in Kabul — repudiate the colonial-era Durand Line, which Pakistan recognises as the rightful border.

Far too many ingénues have been busy drafting lugubrious repines for the troubles faced by Rawalpindi and Islamabad, the seat of the army's power and that of the ISI and their selected prime minister, Imran Khan, respectively. These are all prices that Pakistan's real political masters in khaki are happy to pay. It is the ordinary Pakistani who will pay the price. Fortunately for the Khaki Condominium running Pakistan, the country is not a functioning democracy, rather a praetorian state with a democratic patina. This means that while Imran Khan may not be re-elected, it will not be because of Pakistanis' immiseration. Instead, it will be because the Men in their Pajeros have finally created an alternative to Imran Khan after he's ceased being a useful idiot. From the points of view of the army and the intelligence agency it controls, the ISI, these are not merely prices but investments for the future. Here, I explain why.

For much of the time period of the Raj, Afghanistan was a fealty of the British. British Indians were very active in Afghanistan. With the onset of World War I (1914–18), Afghans supported Ottoman Turkey against the British. Following the defeat of Ottoman Turkey, the so-called [Khilafat Movement \(1919–24\)](#) would start in earnest in South Asia. Afghan's ruler, Habibullah Khan, navigated a policy of non-involvement in the war while British Indians were dispatched to fight in it. Habibullah was assassinated in February 1919 by

anti-British activists. His son, Amanullah Khan, took the throne and promised complete independence from Britain. Persons. With this declaration, the Third Anglo-Afghan War began in May 1919. War-weary Britain was drained and the British Indian Army was exhausted from the brutal demands of World War I. In August 1919, both sides signed a treaty in Rawalpindi — not Calcutta or Delhi.

After a month of desultory skirmishes, the Afghans had successfully secured their own sovereignty with a caveat. Afghanistan had always been a rentier state, dependent upon the financial support of the British to maintain its military among other important functions. When the British left, they took their coffers with them. Consequently, prior to formalising the treaty, Amanullah's government signed a treaty of friendship with the Bolshevik regime in the Soviet Union. In fact, Afghanistan was one of the first states to formally recognise the Soviet Union. Increasingly, the Soviets picked up Afghanistan's tab and their involvement culminated in the Christmas Day invasion of the country of 1979. Until India's Independence in August 1947, British Indian Muslims played an important role in Afghanistan as advisors. Also, during the Khilafat movement and at the urging of many religious leaders, many Indian movements spontaneously moved to Afghanistan where they could be free of British bondage. The Khyber Pass became choked with those seeking to enter Afghanistan along with their animals and carts festooned with their possessions. Overwhelmed by this migration, Afghanistan blocked their emigration. Unfortunately, their woes were not over: Many of the emigres were robbed by Afghan tribes or died of hunger or heat. Those who did make it back to India were destitute.

With India's Independence, the Afghan government preferred to work with Indians as the Afghan government repudiated the Durand Line, which was the international and lawfully recognised border with the new state of Pakistan; rejected Pakistan's admission to the United Nations; launched military incursions along the border; and fanned the flames of Pashtun irredentism. From Pakistan's point of view, a further irritant was a reliance upon Indians advising the various Afghan regimes from 1947 up until the 1988 Geneva Accords which formally ended the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. During this period, estimates of Indian advisors aiding the various governments in Kabul at any given time vary between several hundred and 1,500. After the Soviets withdrew, Afghanistan entered a long and protracted period of civil war followed by the Taliban regime which terrorised Afghans from 1994-2001, when the United States routed them. For the first time ever, it is Pakistan that is sending advisors to Afghanistan. While the Soviet Union left Afghanistan a large rentier state, the United States and its NATO partners built the largest Afghan government in its history and the largest rentier state in its history. Whereas when the Russians left, they were paying about 35 percent of the

government's recurring cost, the Americans were picking up the lion's share of the enormous tab to keep the government afloat. The Taliban, which were never terribly interested in governing, are now under pressure to do so. However, they inherited a large rentier state.

Even though the Taliban purported to offer amnesty to the civilians who worked in the government during the last 20 years, many did not trust them, and they left if they could with the international community that was still able to evacuate terrified Afghans. In fact, some 120,000 left Afghanistan over the objection of the Taliban which believed these Afghans should have stayed to “rebuild” their Emirate. Despite earlier Taliban claims that it had the money to pay for the new government including civil servant salaries, it is now clear that the freeze on Afghan sovereign funds and sanctions has made this impossible. Moreover, the Afghan “government” now faces a serious personnel shortage. Following this reporting, Pakistan announced that it will send “qualified and trained Pakistan manpower to Afghanistan”, specifically those in “medical, IT, finance and accounting”. Pakistan’s selected prime minister also ordered “relevant Pakistani officials to extend cooperation in the fields of railways, minerals, pharmaceuticals, and media to help Afghanistan’s rehabilitation and development”. Afghans understood that the Taliban defeat of their country was actually Pakistan’s victory over Afghanistan via their proxies. Afghans now worry that their colonisation is complete.

For Pakistan, this is a dream come true: For the first time in over 75 years not only are there no Indian advisors in Afghanistan, but there are also now Pakistani advisors in their stead. This alone may be worth the price that Pakistan will continue to pay for its victory in Afghanistan.

The writer is a professor of Security Studies at Georgetown University. She is the author of ‘In Their Own Words: Understanding the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba’ and ‘Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army’s Way of War’. She tweets @cchristinefair. Her website is christinefair.net. Views expressed are personal.