

Understanding Post-9/11 Afghanistan

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This is an excerpt from Understanding Post-9/11 Afghanistan: A Critical Insight into Huntington's Civilizational Approach. An E-IR Open Access Book by Deepshikha Shahi.

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The historic event of 9/11 reminded Brendan Simms of the words of poet William Butler Yeats: 'All changed, changed utterly – a terrible beauty is born'. Yeats was describing the transformation of Irish politics wrought by the seemingly hopeless Easter Rising of 1916 against British rule. These words resonated again on September 11, 2001 when a number of jihadists attempted to inflict damage on the informal American empire by attacking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. What had changed after 9/11? And which terrible beauty was born in the wake of it? The 9/11 attacks symbolically challenged the hegemony of the world's sole superpower – the US, reinforced the demonic image of Islam, and provided a launching pad to an indefinite US-led global war on terror [Islamic terror?] with Afghanistan as its starting point. The terrible beauty born out of these catastrophic developments was the 'popular acceptance' of a world laden with frequent devastating clashes between so-called terrorist and democratic forces. While the idea of eliminating terrorism and spreading democracy was beautiful, the permanent labeling of certain forces as 'terrorist' and the others as 'democratic' was terrible.

Against this circumstantial backdrop, the thesis of civilizational clash propagated by Huntington gained momentum. Huntington's thesis, which had projected a post-Cold War world marked by bloody conflicts between different civilizations, especially between the Western and Islamic civilizations, not only became instrumental in legitimising the US-led military operations in Afghanistan, but also in reaffirming a similar jihadist worldview endorsed by a few orthodox Islamists operating in Afghanistan. Was this civilizational approach to decode post-9/11 Afghan politics theoretically appropriate and, or, strategically prudent? This study began with the objective of providing a critical insight into the civilizational approach and offering an alternative understanding of post-9/11 Afghanistan. The attempt to fulfil this objective was carried out in four stages: (i) Designing a 'psychological critique' of the civilizational approach; (ii) Explaining the 'popular receptivity' of Huntington's civilizations thesis amongst the Afghans and demonstrating its harmful implications for post-9/11 Afghan politics; (iii) Establishing Critical International Theory (CIT) as a more meritorious theoretical framework in comparison to Huntington's civilizations thesis; and (iv) Providing an alternative and more accurate vision of post-9/11 Afghan politics from the critical-theoretical standpoint.

Psychological Critique: The Knowledge-Violence Nexus

Critical insights into Huntington's civilizational approach had already been provided by scholars of diverse philosophical traditions. They have criticised the clash of civilizations thesis on epistemological, methodological, and ethical grounds. The epistemological critique condemned the clash of civilizations thesis based on its realist, orientalist and elitist outlook. The methodological critique attacked its *monolithic*, *inconsistent* and *reductionist/essentialist* attitude while the ethical critique denounced it for being a *purposeful* thesis that fuelled enemy discourse and in the process, became a *self-fulfilling* prophecy. Though the critiques of Huntington's thesis strongly pointed out its various flaws, they were weaker when it came to explaining its receptivity not just amongst decision-makers and shapers but also amongst the masses across the globe. Despite the copious and essentially

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valid criticisms, the clash of civilizations thesis flourished. Any attempt to check this trend required a serious probing into the issue of how people became so receptive to such a provocative body of knowledge. In other words, how aggressive scripts like Huntington's thesis interacted with the psyche of the people so as to transform them into its violent agents? In an attempt to find an answer to this question, this study drew inspiration from the academic discipline of psychology. It evoked the humanistic-existential model of psychology for providing an explanation of the widespread receptivity of Huntington's thesis.

According to the humanistic-existential model, a combination of two paradoxical forces determined human behaviour. First, the *free agency* of the individual who was personally responsible for creating meanings in an apparently meaningless world; Second, the compulsion of the *conditions of existence* that influenced the individual's willingness or unwillingness to create or believe in a particular set of meanings. From this perspective, Huntington's thesis won receptivity because of two reasons: First, Huntington's willingness to generate a specific notion of reality; Second, the people's choice to identify their own perception of reality with that notion. In other words, Huntington's presentation of an imagined reality (i.e. false consciousness), which was defined in terms of a civilizational clash, became an actual reality (i.e. false real consciousness) only when people chose to believe in it and act or react upon it.

The purpose behind Huntington's decision to present reality in a specific way and the people's choice to accept it existed in their respective conditions of existence. Under the conditions of the post-Cold War world, the artificial construct of 'bloody Islamic borders' allowed Huntington to gain an influential position amongst the US foreign policymakers who were desperately looking for an alarming discourse which could justify their aggressive policies as legitimate defensive action. Huntington's deliberate ignorance of the miserable conditions of existence in Muslim societies and his attribution of their consequent frustration to a kind of civilizational-cultural-religious disorder assigned a new meaning to the persisting political issues. This new meaning served the purpose of its believers at many levels. Firstly, it helped US policymakers to divert the attention of both Muslims and non-Muslims away from the actual suffering and the creative possibilities of the Islamic world, thereby facilitating a guaranteed American hegemony. Secondly, it allowed the fundamentalists in both Islamic and Western societies to infuriate the masses, thereby paving the way for satisfying their personal ambitions.

Though Huntington's dangerous motive became obvious as soon as he activated his abstract idea of 'civilizational identity' by awakening a hatred for other civilizations, it was well-received by the people who found it helpful in their respective living conditions. The cascading effect of the abstract idea of 'civilizational identity' totally obscured the complexity of human identity formation, and thus weakened the effort at human emancipation. However, the humanistic-existential model was optimistic in its assertion that the popularity of Huntington's thesis was largely an outcome of the personal choice of human beings who were embedded in their respective conditions of existence as free agents. As such, the issue of acceptance or rejection of the civilizational approach became a matter of free choice and the responsibility for exposing its harmful implications rested on free individuals. In the light of the lessons drawn from this psychological critique, the study went further to uncover the psychological mechanism that granted political receptivity to Huntington's ideas in Afghanistan, thereby exposing its harmful impact on post-9/11 Afghan politics.

Political Receptivity: The Islamic Appeal for Pashtun Benefit

The study employed the combination of agency and structure, as stressed by the humanistic-existential model of psychology, for explaining the general history of political reception and the particular history of Huntington's reception in Afghan politics. A careful reading of Afghan history suggested that any political discourse was psychologically well received by the majority of Afghans if it possessed two features – first, the intellectual agency shaped the content of the discourse in such a way as to make a strong reference to 'Islam'; second, the intellectual structure, traditionally dominated by the ethnic Pashtuns (Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Nuristanis, being other less numerous Afghan ethnicities), found the discourse politically beneficial for itself. The awakening of Islamic content provides political benefits for Pashtuns since it potentially enables any political discourse incorporating the Islamic content to capture the 'social imaginary' of Afghans. Since the prevalence of Islam and the dominance of ethnic Pashtuns marked a historical continuity in Afghan politics, they remained crucial in determining the Afghan social imaginary. This study examined the receptivity or non-receptivity of the political discourses generated by different regimes in Afghanistan –

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Peoples' Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the Mujahideen, the Taliban/al-Qaida – in terms of their success or failure to capture this Afghan social imaginary. The study then explained the popularity of Huntington's thesis amongst the Afghans by mapping its resemblance with the relatively more popular Taliban/al-Qaida discourse.

The study demonstrated that the Marxism-inspired and Soviet-backed PDPA discourse could not win ample support as it lacked Islamic content and held no promise for political benefit to the structurally dominant group of Pashtuns. The PDPA regime was followed by Mujahideen rule. In fact, the Mujahideen managed to enter the political mainstream by exposing the infidelity of the PDPA. In contrast to the attempted imposition of an atheistic Marxist regime by the PDPA, the Mujahideen claimed to establish an Islamic State of Afghanistan, thereby developing a religiously charged and therefore comparatively more effective political discourse. The Mujahideen discourse was rich in terms of both Islamic content and political attractiveness for ethnic Pashtuns. Six of the seven Mujahideen organisations were dominated by Pashtuns. However, the Mujahideen failed to deliver the promise of clear political benefit to Pashtuns as the non-Pashtun members refused to accept Pashtun dominance. Moreover, the Mujahideen coalition committed the mistake of excluding a major Pashtun organisation led by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, thereby further causing division amongst the Pashtun majority. The moderate Islamism propagated by the Mujahideen discourse proved incapable of binding the Pashtuns together and was rapidly replaced with the Taliban's extremist medievalism in the name of Islam. The Taliban/al-Qaida discourse was more successful than the Mujahideen discourse. The study compared the 'contents' (the propounder's agency) and the 'attending circumstances' (the follower's structure) of these two discourses in order to explain the greater success of the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse.

A comparison of the contents of the Mujahideen and Taliban/al-Qaida discourses revealed the following points of departure. First, the Mujahideen discourse made an Islamic appeal to expel one country – the Soviet Union, whereas the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse activated the Islamic appeal primarily to destroy America, but also to attack all Western countries led by the US. Thus, the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse was meant to fight a larger and more powerful opposition. Second, the Mujahideen discourse presented the Soviets as infidels who had little respect for the believers of Islam, whereas the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse projected the Western countries not just as infidels but also as 'Zionist-Crusaders' who were the traditional enemies of the believers of Islam. Therefore, the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse was framed to deal with a more dangerous opposition that was not just disrespectful but also historically driven by the spirit of animosity against Islam. Third, the Mujahideen discourse sought to mobilise the diverse ethnic groups of Afghanistan, whereas the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse chiefly targeted the Pashtuns, not the other ethnic groups, as its potential audience. It contained a heavy dose of 'Pashtunwali' and reflected an 'anti-Shiite' inclination, thereby proving more successful in attracting the structurally dominant group of Pashtuns. Fourth, the Mujahideen discourse tried to channel the energy of Afghans against the Soviet-backed regime, whereas the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse aimed at raising all the Afghan and non-Afghan believers of Islam to fight for removing the Western interference from internal political affairs of all Muslim states in the world. The Taliban/al-Qaida discourse was more ambitious as it was designed to direct a transnational project.

The circumstantial factors attending the two discourses were compared at two levels – domestic and global. At the domestic level, the situation attending the Mujahideen discourse was marked by the weak political credentials of the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime, whereas the circumstances facing the arrival of the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse were defined by the eroded political legitimacy of mutually warring ethnicities of Mujahideen. In contrast to the Mujahideen discourse, the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse offered greater prospect for political benefit to ethnic Pashtuns as it promised the riddance of, and victory over, not just the foreign Soviet force, but also the domestic non-Pashtun forces comprising the warring factions of Mujahideen. The Taliban/al-Qaida discourse found a ready purchase amongst the Pashtuns also because it ignited the hope for resolving their age-old 'Pashtunistan issue', whereby they had been demanding an independent or semi-independent statehood for themselves. The study suggested that so long as the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse managed to keep the hope for concretising the dream of Pashtunistan alive, it was likely to retain its appeal amongst the majority of Afghans who are Pashtuns.

At the global level, the Mujahideen discourse emerged when the Soviet Union and its Stalinised model of governance was breaking up, whereas the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse originated when the US and its capitalist model of development was being declared as victorious. The comparatively weaker Soviet opponent of the Mujahideen

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discourse was not stimulating enough to bind the Afghans for long, whereas the hegemonic tendencies of the US continued to remain sufficiently challenging to provoke an ongoing protest by the Taliban and al-Qaida. Besides the provocations unleashed from the hegemonic tendencies of the US, the study attributed the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism under the leadership of the Taliban and al-Qaida to the general decline of secular modernity. Against the backdrop of the poor performance of secular states, the alternative model of an 'Islamic state' offered by the Islamist movements easily gained widespread attention. It was no wonder that the extreme vision of Islamism propagated by the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse became immensely popular amongst the Afghans who were disillusioned by the efforts of various Afghan modernisers in uplifting their miserable living conditions.

The factors explaining the influential impact of the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse also provided clues for understanding the popularity of Huntington's thesis amongst the Afghans. The study traced a striking resemblance between the discourses generated by the Taliban/al-Qaida and Huntington. Like the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse, which established the West as the enemy of Islam and intended to mobilise Muslims around the world to safeguard their sacred Islamic lands from Western intervention, the Huntingtonian discourse of civilizational clash inversely matched these propositions by presenting Islam as the most intolerant and aggressive civilization that posed the greatest threat to the West. Huntington advised the West to protect itself from Islamic demons by exploiting the differences between the non-Western civilizations and by maintaining the superiority of the West. While the Taliban and al-Qaida appealed for Islamisation, Huntington called for Americanisation. Both the discourses emerged around the mid-1990s, uttered the language of religious war and fed upon their mutual enmity. The common violent thrusts of both the discourses continued to thrive upon their capacity to accept and reinforce each other. Huntington himself admitted this reality in an interview with Nathan Gardels. He stated that the terrorist actions of Osama bin Laden had reinvigorated civilizational identity. However, the study pointed out that the sense of common 'civilizational identity' had better served the interests of the US than that of the Afghans. The 'civilizational identity' had granted the US a profound ideological-political-diplomatic gain by enabling it to subordinate the UN and to create an 'international coalition' of states, many of which were themselves guilty of practicing terrorism. It had also allowed the US to have a military-political entry in Central Asia on a depth and scale that it never before had. By contrast, the activation of 'civilizational identity' by the Taliban and al-Qaida had not been able to deliver anything better than a war-torn, and insecure, nation for the Afghans.

The Afghans who believed in the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse were bound to succumb to the intellectual insights of Huntington's thesis which endorsed the same worldview in a reverse guise. The popularity of al-Zawahiri's text – '*Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*' – that presented a worldview comparable, but in reverse, to Huntington's thesis, confirmed this line of argument. The study asserted that the Afghans who were trapped in a vicious cycle generated by these two destructive discourses had not been able to bring an end to their tragic state of affairs and to tap their constructive potential for building an alternative theoretical and political discourse for themselves. It was suggested that the lack of an alternative theoretical-political discourse largely accounted for the absence of an alternative and peaceful way of life for the Afghans. In its search for an alternative discourse, the study examined the theoretical credentials of CIT, thereby highlighting its methodological edge over and above the clash of civilizations thesis.

The Meritorious Framework of CIT: Temporal and Spatial Sensitivity

For judging the relative merits of two or more substantive theories making competing claims about social reality, Rosenberg evoked Ian Craib's three criteria. First, the theory must be based on mutually *consistent* propositions. Second, the theory must be measured against *evidence*. Third, the theory must specify in *more detail* the causal processes at work and the situations in which the causal mechanisms come into operation. Judging by these criteria, the study attempted to establish CIT – that combined within its ambit two main sets of influences, the 'production paradigm' shaped by the work of Antonio Gramsci and introduced into IR by Robert Cox; and the 'communication paradigm' developed by the Frankfurt School (Habermas, Horkheimer, and Adorno) and applied to IR by Andrew Linklater – as a more meritorious theoretical framework than Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis. Before demonstrating the relative strengths of CIT against the weaknesses of the clash of civilizations thesis, the study constructed CIT as a single overarching framework and traced the overlap between the discernments obtained from the humanistic-existential model of psychology and the assertions of CIT.

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In its attempt to forge a strong nexus between the twin paradigms of CIT, this study put forward the argument that the common emancipatory objectives of the 'production' and 'communication' paradigms of CIT emanated from a common broad intellectual project wherein the themes of *hegemony*, *reason* and *transcendence* played a central role. It asserted that the hegemonic elements of the production paradigm tended to owe their existence to the virtual speech community of the communication paradigm. The central significance of manufacturing acquiescence and legitimacy in the formation of a hegemonic order made it difficult to situate its existence entirely within the confines of the production paradigm. The reason backing the process of manufacturing acquiescence and legitimacy was largely shaped and contested within the boundaries of the communication paradigm. The principal battleground over which the struggle for hegemony was now occurring moved beyond the traditional Westphalian states-system. Cox's global civil society had a striking resemblance to Linklater's community of mankind as both reflected a cosmopolitan outlook.

After highlighting the connectivity between the dual paradigms of CIT, the study went further to map out the common characteristics of the humanistic-existential model of psychology and CIT. The humanistic-existential model of psychology held that the interplay of agency and structure characterised the collective understanding of ontology at different historical junctures. Such an approach to ontology found expression in the writings of CIT. Cox opined that ontologies were the parameters of our existence. He argued that reality was constructed by human minds which in turn were shaped by the complex of social relations. Linklater admitted that the capacities of human minds were linked inextricably with the forms of life in which they were involved. The modifications of human minds went hand-in-hand with the course of human history and therefore ontologies were not arbitrary constructions but the specifications of the common sense of an epoch.

The study derived four lessons from this common line of thinking that underpinned CIT and the humanistic-existential model of psychology. First, the ontology was constructed *collectively*, not individually. Second, the ontology existed in *plurality*, not singularity. Third, the process of establishing a dominant ontology was marked by *contestation*, not unanimity. Fourth, the dominant ontology was *dynamic*, not static. This understanding of ontology as a collective, pluralised, contested, and dynamic enterprise enabled CIT not only to expose the inadequacies of Huntington's thesis but also to emerge as a more consistent and comprehensive alternative theoretical framework.

In contrast to the post-positivist tilt of CIT, the positivist methodology of Huntington mistakenly treated ontology not as a dynamic construct but as a static entity which was essentially deterministic, ahistoric and immobile. Therefore, for Huntington, the dominant ontology that supported the notion of a prospective clash of civilizations was not an outcome of the *time and space sensitive* contestation between diverse collective human responses to varied conditions of existence, but a temporally and spatially neutral observation that had to be passively accepted. The historically and geographically determined causal mechanisms underlying the dominant ontology of civilizational clash remained undiagnosed by Huntington. This technical mistake accounted for a serious ethical failure. In the process of taking the dominant ontology of civilizational clash as granted, Huntington ended up *reinforcing* a conflictive world order rather than explaining it. What presented itself initially as the *explanandum* – the world order fraught with a civilizational clash as the developing outcome of some historical process (i.e. the end of the ideological clash associated with the Cold War) – was progressively transformed into the *explanans* as it was the civilizational clash which now explained the changing character of the world order and informed the foreign policy orientation of the states that wished to survive within it. Huntington's thesis was trapped in what Rosenberg called 'empty circularity'. The chance of surpassing this hellish state of affairs was totally circumscribed by Huntington. While the critics who did not subscribe to CIT considered Huntington's mistake as *accidental* and therefore began with finding fault in the epistemology (realist, orientalist, and elitist) and/or methodology (monolithic, inconsistent, and reductionist/essentialist) of the clash of civilizations thesis, CIT attempted to uncover the hidden purposeful designs of Huntington and his supporters and suggested that Huntington's mistake was *intentional* as theories were always meant for serving particular purposes.

CIT's post-positivist orientation enabled it to overcome the methodological deficiencies of Huntington's thesis and carve out an alternative that was *technically efficient* and *ethically sound*. The technical efficiency and ethical soundness of CIT germinated from its flexible theoretical tool that ensured two advantages. First, it combined the moments of 'synchronic' and 'diachronic' analysis to provide a time and space sensitive explanation of the social

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reality. While the synchronic analysis had status-quoist tendencies as it is intended to correct the problems of the existing social order while retaining its base, the addition of the diachronic analysis to it allowed for a normative choice in favour of a social and political order different from the prevailing order. As such, CIT promised to prove useful not only in grasping the evolution of an ever changing social order but also in *influencing* and *channelling* the process of social change. CIT's move towards a new social order was not motivated by the idea of serving narrow self-interests but by a broad humane interest in enlightenment and emancipation. By relentlessly focusing on the question of emancipation and by questioning what this might mean in terms of the theory and practice of world politics, CIT successfully crossed Huntingtonian limits to a desirable social transformation that might be instrumental in building a peaceful world order.

Second, unlike Huntington's thesis, CIT did not convert the explanandum into explanan and therefore was free from the vice of empty circularity. In order to avoid empty circularity, Rosenberg had recommended that the explanation must fall back on some more basic social theory which could clarify as to why the phenomenon which was being explained became such a distinctive and salient feature of the contemporary world. The study showed that CIT could serve as the more basic social theory which could explain why the phenomenon of 'civilizational clash' gained momentum in the present era. The production paradigm of CIT could throw light on the disguised political and economic factors working behind what appeared as the 'civilizational conflict' while the communication paradigm of CIT could reveal the concealed impact of the ruptures or distortions in dialogue on the aggravation of the so-called civilizational tensions. On the basis of the insights drawn from its overarching theoretical tool, CIT could take a step further in the direction of formulating a *practical agenda* for socio-political transformation and emancipation. Guided by these theoretical and strategic merits, the study set out to apply CIT to provide an alternative and more accurate understanding of post-9/11 Afghanistan.

Post-9/11 Afghanistan: A Venue for Clashing Hegemonic Aspirations

The study employed CIT not only to provide an alternative and finer vision of the post-9/11 Afghan crisis, but also to suggest a way out of it. Cox's production paradigm was activated to demonstrate the hegemonic shifts in Afghan politics. Linklater's communication paradigm was operationalised to trace the linkage of these hegemonic shifts with the dialogic tensions in Afghan society. The alternative understanding derived from the application of these two paradigms reconstructed the post-9/11 Afghan scenario as an instance of a clash of hegemonic aspirations. Finally, the study recommended critical solutions for resolving so-called civilizational problems in post-9/11 Afghanistan.

For activating the Coxian theoretical scheme in order to mark the hegemonic shifts in post-9/11 Afghan politics, the study raised two questions: First, how did specific historical moments in national and global politics (structure) and collective human responses to them (agency) promote temporary coalitions of diverse hegemonic social forces in Afghanistan?; Second, how did the innate contradictions in these hegemonic coalitions develop, thereby historically transforming Afghan politics from one hegemonic phase to another? Since the post-9/11 Afghan scenario was largely a culmination of political events that began with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the late 1970s, the study situated the above-mentioned questions against that historical backdrop. It was observed that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan had a disturbing effect on both national (Afghan) politics and global politics. Its atheistic orientation threatened the hegemony of Islamists at the national level and its communist commitment generated insecurity for US hegemony at the global level. In its attempt to counter the Soviet influence in Afghanistan, the US began to support the Islamists, or the Mujahideen who had already been organising themselves against the Soviet-backed Leftist regime. This was a historical moment underlined by the temporary coalition of two diverse hegemonic social forces in Afghanistan: First, the Mujahideen dominated by ethnic Pashtuns who had hegemonised Afghanistan since its origin as a modern nation-state in 1747; Second, the Americans who had hegemonised the globe since the end of the Second World War in 1945.

Contradictions in this hegemonic coalition cropped up with the withdrawal of the Soviet forces and the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union reduced US interest in Afghanistan and deprived the Mujahideen of their common enemy. In the absence of a common enemy, the Pashtun-dominated political organisations of Mujahideen separated, thereby causing a split in the national hegemony of Pashtuns. The split in national hegemony caused a civil war which was characterised by several disjointed counter-hegemonic struggles wherein different non-Pashtun

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ethnic groups began to make their separate efforts to challenge the traditional Pashtun hegemony in Afghan politics. The study pointed out that the non-Pashtuns could not effectively challenge Pashtun hegemony as they failed to provide an agenda for generating an alternative knowledge-base and the corresponding social relations of production. By contrast, the Pashtuns, who had reorganised under the aegis of the Taliban and al-Qaida, evoked 'Sharia' as the alternative source of knowledge. They introduced alternative social relations of production whereby the localised predatory warlordism of the pre-Taliban era was replaced with a weak kind of rentier state power based on a criminalised open economy. The khan-dominated subsistence and local-trade economy was removed to establish a warlord-dominated commercial agriculture. This provided the newly armed elite [the Taliban] with the opportunity to mobilise resources to exercise power directly as it never had before. The Afghans, who were desperately looking for peace after facing a long civil war, chose to accept the alternative offered by the Taliban and al-Qaida, even if it meant re-asserting Pashtun hegemony in Afghan politics.

The US, that initially had no objection to the rise of Pashtun hegemony under the leadership of the Taliban and al-Qaida, gradually became critical of it as its aggressive acts had started affecting areas beyond the frontiers of Afghanistan. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 provoked the long-standing anguish of the US and the declaration of war on terror in Afghanistan was its violent outcome. This was a peculiar historical juncture that witnessed a direct confrontation between the same national and global hegemonic forces that had once formed a temporary coalition in Afghanistan. Now their hegemonic aspirations clashed with each other. In this clash of hegemonic aspirations, the US and the Taliban/al-Qaida generated their own versions of the dominant form of knowledge. While sources in the US propagated the clash of civilizations doctrine, the Taliban/al-Qaida disseminated a similar Jihadist ideology. The study pointed out that though these hegemonic discourses continued to grasp the psyche of a large section of people across the globe, their gradually weakening influence became apparent in the increasing use of force by both the US and the Taliban/al-Qaida. While they occasionally exercised force against each other, they also counted on each other for carrying out various fraudulent activities, opium cultivation being one of them. The study observed that the deep-rooted corruption in post-9/11 Afghan politics had not only created confusion but had also generated apathy in Afghan civil society. Though the presence of some progressive elements in Afghan civil society could not be denied, the study asserted that their uncoordinated and at times hidden efforts were hardly organised around a supporting alternative knowledge-base and alternative social relations of production. These efforts were therefore hardly sufficient to take the shape of an effective counter-hegemonic struggle.

The study proceeded to explain these hegemonic shifts in Afghan politics in terms of the dialogic tensions between Islamists and the West on the one hand, and between various Afghan ethnicities on the other. In this endeavour, the study posed two questions: first, on what normative grounds did the hegemonic discourses in post-9/11 Afghan history systematically include or exclude specific voices? Second, had the hitherto excluded voices been able to generate a 'moral capital' that could constitute the basis of a genuine counter-hegemonic struggle? These questions were examined in the context of two clearly identifiable phases of Pashtun hegemony in recent Afghan history. The first hegemonic phase appeared when the Pashtun-dominated Mujahideen joined hands to fight against the Soviets. The second hegemonic phase emerged when the Pashtuns reorganised under the Taliban and came together with al-Qaida to fight against the Americans.

During the first hegemonic phase, the hegemonic discourse produced by the Mujahideen promoted two norms: pro-Islam and anti-foreign. The Afghans, who were deeply religious and fiercely independent, quickly responded to the fatwa issued by the Mujahideen. However, a close reading of the fatwa found that the Mujahideen discourse was exclusionary on two grounds. First, it intended to exclude 'insincere Muslims' who were modernists or were under other non-Islamic political influence. Second, it totally closed the possibility of an open dialogue with non-Muslims as they were considered kafirs. The repercussions of this exclusionary attitude became visible at two levels. At the national level, the Muslim sentiment present in the Mujahideen discourse temporarily mobilised all the ethnic groups of Afghanistan against the Soviets, but its 'selective' Islamic preference resulted in the formation of a loose Islamic Alliance which soon collapsed after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. At the global level, the principle of non-engagement with non-Muslims was not actually practiced by the Mujahideen. Despite the closed nature of the Mujahideen discourse, the Mujahideen movement sought external support not just from various Islamic states, but also from the US which was supposed to be treated as a kafir country as per Mujahideen standards. The gap between the verbal declarations and the practical strategy of the Mujahideen proved disastrous. The ethnic rivalry for

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receiving military and financial aid from diverse external sources caused feuding not only amongst the Pashtun-dominated organisations of the Mujahideen, but also amongst various Afghan ethnicities. This rivalry ultimately led to the fall of Pashtun hegemony and caused a civil war in Afghanistan.

While the civil war remained inconclusive, the Pashtuns began to reclaim their lost hegemonic status by launching the Taliban movement in a close alliance with al-Qaida. In this second phase of Pashtun hegemony, the hegemonic discourse generated by the Taliban/al-Qaida endorsed two norms: pro-martyrdom and anti-America. The Taliban/al-Qaida discourse indicated a rupture in the dialogic possibilities between the Islamists and the Americans, and tended to exclude the voices of those secular Muslims who lived in the West. The Taliban/al-Qaida also demonstrated exclusionary tendencies towards the Shia Hazaras. The excesses committed during the Taliban regime attracted criticisms from all corners of the world. Despite the growing worldwide criticism, the Taliban/al-Qaida continued to spread destruction and to push their hegemonic discourse. They proudly took responsibility for the terrorist attacks of 9/11, but when their pride in killing Americans was not shared by many religious leaders in Islamic societies, they denied any involvement in it. At one moment, they described themselves as anti-America and not as anti-Americans, and at another moment they claimed to be both. The contradictory statements released by them disseminated distorted meanings in the Afghan dialogic community. The dialogic distortions created by the Taliban/al-Qaida seriously undermined their consensual legitimacy. The sudden undermining of consensual legitimacy resulted in greatly weakening their hegemony. Consequently, post-9/11 Afghan politics totally discarded the voice of the Taliban and took notice of only those anti-Taliban voices that had organised themselves under the aegis of the US-backed Northern Alliance.

However, the study highlighted that in the years following 9/11 the leaders of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan gradually shifted their attitudes towards the Taliban. There had been a renewal in the ties between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban on the one hand, and a growing distance in relations between the Taliban and al-Qaida, on the other. The confusing shifts in allegiances blurred the Afghan dialogic space. A good number of Afghans had lost their faith in the utility of dialogue. Though the critical voices of Afghan NGOs, INGOs, inter-governmental organisations, academic institutions, and donor governments had made a remarkable entry into the Afghan dialogic community, they failed to generate a unified discourse. In the absence of a unified discourse, the anti-hegemonic moral capital remained under-exploited. The study declared that post-9/11 Afghanistan stood at a crossroads marked by complex interactions between feebly hegemonic, as well as aspiring, counter-hegemonic social forces.

In its attempt to find an exit from this troubling state of affairs, the study recommended the organisation of an effective counter-hegemonic struggle against both the national Pashtun hegemony and the global US hegemony. This demanded the designing of an *alternative knowledge-base*, the organisation of the critical social forces along *alternative social relations of production*, and the creation of an *all-inclusive speech community*. The study considered the philosophical tenets of the Quran as the potential source of an alternative knowledge-base in post-9/11 Afghan politics. It held that the adherence to Islamic philosophy would provide a check on the conceits of religious power and would advocate 'inter-faith' discussions on Islam, thereby laying the foundation for an all-inclusive Afghan dialogic community. The philosophical approach to the Quran would create ample space for a passionate dialogue between followers of religious, spiritual, and secular Islamic traditions. An open dialogue between various Islamic and non-Islamic voices would differently inform the common consciousness of Afghans. The common consciousness raised by the cross-fertilisation of varied Islamic interpretations would transcend that concept of Islamism which sees it as an exclusivist and totalising ideology, thereby promoting a 'post-Islamic' current that would espouse inclusion and pluralism. The post-Islamic ideology would demand equal basic civil rights for all Muslim and non-Muslim residents of Afghanistan and would attempt to organise them along alternative social relations of production.

The study suggested that a preliminary post-Islamic agenda for establishing alternative social relations of production could draw inspiration from Michael Lowy's idea of 'elective affinity' that demonstrated how Christianity had turned into the institutionalised ideology of communistic utopianism in Latin America. Based on the Latin American model of Christian liberation theology, the study asserted that the critical social forces in post-9/11 Afghanistan must strive to construct a post-Islamic liberation theology that could permit Islam to breed such governmental institutions that could redress the grievances of the poor Afghans and genuinely work for transforming their miserable conditions of

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existence. The study concluded that the humanistic re-interpretation of the Quran by the post-Islamic counter-hegemonic forces in Afghanistan would not only pave the way for transforming the post-9/11 Afghan crisis, but would also be a crucial step towards vindicating Islam against its distortion and demonisation by both Muslim and non-Muslim hegemonic aspirants in the contemporary world.

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