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Book Review: Fundamentalism Reborn? by William Maley

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Fundamentalism Reborn? William Maley, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1998. Pp. 253)

This volume covers recent developments in Afghanistan. Although fundamentalism is addressed in some of the articles, the title is somewhat misleading. The subject of the book is Afghanistan, not fundamentalism.

The data are very timely, including even events that occurred in 1998. The editor begins the book with a brief account of the rise of the Taliban (plural of *talib*, religious student) in the seminaries of Pakistan. The Taliban are Pushtuns, the ethnic group of southern Afghanistan and part of Pakistan. Once the Taliban achieved military success in Afghanistan, secular Pushtuns, including former communists, integrated into the movement; thus some of the contributing authors view the Taliban as the continued dominance of Afghanistan by its largest ethnic group, the Pushtuns.

The Taliban are fundamentalists in that they aim to use the coercive power of the state to insure that Afghans obey the "dictates of the faith" as interpreted by the Taliban's religious authority, Muhammad Omar (18-19). The Rabbani government (1992-1996) was also fundamentalist, but Rabbani was the political leader of Jamiat-e Islami, a predominantly Tajik (Persian-speaking Sunni) group. The Jamiat was opposed by the Pakistani-supported Hezb-e Islami, a Pushtun group led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Since Pakistan gave out the "lion's share of American arms and other foreign aid to the Mujahidin" fighting against Afghanistan's communist government, any group Pakistan backed was greatly strengthened vis-à-vis other Afghan groups (37). Pakistan backed first Hekmatyar and then, when he proved incapable of getting control of the country, shifted its sponsorship to the Taliban.

Pakistan's overriding interest in Afghanistan is in developing a secure trade route through Afghanistan to Central Asia. Pakistan's foreign policy has therefore been to create an Afghan military group

capable of pacifying Afghanistan and willing to cooperate with Pakistan in moving Central Asian oil to world markets. Despite all the assistance the Taliban has received from Pakistan, it is not a puppet, e.g. Taliban detention of a Russian aircrew in 1995-6 was against Pakistani advice.

The primary financial backer of the Taliban has been Saudi Arabia, but now that most of Afghanistan is under their control, they are able to collect 'taxes' from heroin traders and transporters of other goods.

Once Madelaine Albright became U.S. Secretary of State, American government acceptance of the Taliban was diminished but not ended. The U.S. position is influenced by the fact that the main contender for the pipeline to bring Central Asian oil to international markets is a coalition of UNOCAL of California and Delta Oil of Saudi Arabia. The two have signed an agreement with Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and powerful Washington lobbies such as the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) along with many members of Congress strongly support the Afghanistan-Pakistan route for the pipeline. Because of the Taliban's human rights violations and policies toward drug traders, the State Department is much less enthusiastic.

Although Russia and the Central Asian governments need an oil pipeline, they fear militant fundamentalism and do not want the Taliban to get control of all Afghanistan. Thus they have been providing humanitarian assistance and some logistical support to the non-Pushtun groups in northern Afghanistan. Iran also supports the Northern Alliance, the anti-Pushtun coalition which has prevented the Taliban from getting control of the whole country. The United Nations has delivered humanitarian assistance to all the groups in Afghanistan, but it has been hampered by the absence of a government partner, the Taliban having shown no administrative capacity.

The Taliban insistence on separate educational and health facilities for women has meant very few Afghan women get any of

either. In her article on Afghan women, Nancy Hatch Dupree reports Taliban statements that Afghan women have to be kept out of sight because they might be sexually dishonored if they appear in public, the old argument that women's freedom has to be sacrificed to keep men from sinning. She also reports that after the leftist coup of 1978, some Afghani women were "flaunting their sexuality" (153n), but avoids challenging this claim as justification for depriving all Afghan women of their freedom. The author does point out that the Taliban's not allowing Afghani women to work has reduced many of them to begging, something that was not seen in Afghanistan before the Taliban.

Bernt Glatzer provides an easy-to-follow exposition of Afghani ethnic groups and tribes. He does not see Afghanistan as close to ethnic or tribal disintegration but acknowledges that it could happen.

William Maley reviews the several failed UN mediation efforts in Afghanistan and blames UN ignorance about Afghanistan for a long list of mistakes, including providing sanctuary to Najibullah and undermining the Rabbani government. His most telling criticism is one that can be leveled at the UN in other countries as well, namely misapplying the idea of neutrality by blaming all sides equally. Bosnia and south Lebanon come to mind.

Olivier Roy distinguishes between traditional fundamentalism that has been pervasive in modern Afghan history, and two Islamist movements in Afghanistan, the primarily Tajik Jamiat and the Pushtun Hezb. He dubs the Taliban neo-fundamentalist and describes neo-fundamentalism as blending traditional fundamentalism with anti-Shi'ism and an "anti-Western cultural and political bias" (202). He attributes neo-fundamentalism to Arab volunteers in the Afghan Mujahidin and anticipates a return to traditional fundamentalism in Afghanistan.

In the last article Shahrani advocates a return to loose federation as the only workable political model for Afghanistan. He

believes Islamism has been discredited by the war between the Jamiat and the Hezb and by the Taliban version of Islam. He argues that a centralized state dominated by the Taliban or another Pushtun group would require severe repression and foreign assistance to maintain its control, if it could get control. He laments the fact that some Western governments have been convinced "that there cannot be an Afghanistan without Pushtun leadership" (233). Exactly how the "loosely-structured federal system" (239) would operate is not spelled out, but he refers to a central government in which "shura" (consultation) would apply while governance would be by local officials.

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