

INNOCENCE LOST

Dr. Fazal-ur-Rahim Marwat

DAWN – October 30, 2005

Shows how young Afghan minds were poisoned to indoctrinate an entire generation in Afghanistan

From Muhajir to Mujahid: Politics of War through Aid

By Dr. Fazal-ur-Rahim Marwat

Edited by Dr. Pervez Khan Toru

Pakistan Study Centre, University of Peshawar

Dr. Fazal-ur-Rahim Marwat is an associate Professor at the Pakistan Study Centre, University of Peshawar.

The books included much unnecessary material and were not written with the purpose of education in mind. They were rather designed for ideological propaganda... Generally all these books were written with the purpose of keeping children away from normal development

THE Islamic nature of the Afghan resistance highlighted the close relationship between religion and politics and encouraged the establishment of approximately 1,000 Islamic madressas (religious schools) and Dar-ul-Ulum. This was done with aid from Middle Eastern countries to provide an ideological base for the Afghan jihad. *The Frontier Post* (Peshawar) reported on July 17, 1992, that Rs.15.969 million had been distributed amongst 42 *deeni* madressas alone in the period 1984-91, from the Provincial Auqaf Fund. Most Arab donors injected sectarian ideologies into the refugees through these religious institutions to gain their own ends...

According to investigative reports for the *Washington Post*, over the past 20 years the US has spent millions of dollars producing fanatical schoolbooks which were then distributed in Afghanistan. These books were developed in the early 1980's under a USAID grant to the University of Nebraska-Omaha and its centre for Afghan studies. "The primers, which were filled with talk of jihad featured drawings of guns, bullets, soldiers and mines. They have served since then as the Afghan school system's core curriculum. Even the Taliban used the American-produced books, though the radical movement scratched out human faces in keeping with its strict fundamentalist code." According to the *Washington Post*, these violent Islamist schoolbooks produced unintended consequences.

The books included much unnecessary material and were not written with the purpose of education in mind. They were rather designed for ideological propaganda. At the primary level the material in the mathematics books featured problems such as:

If out of 10 atheists, 5 were killed by 1 Muslim, 5 would be left.

5 guns + 5 guns = 10 guns

15 bullets -10 bullets = 5 bullets, etc.

Generally all these books were written with the purpose of keeping children away from normal development. The Dari and Pushto textbooks begin with *Hamd* (poems in praise of God) and *Na'at* (poems in praise of the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH), and end with the four orthodox caliphs and their biographies, also mentioning in the process topics such as *mujahid*, guns, bullets, atheism, martyrdom and ghazi.

Even organic chemistry and zoology books leaned towards Islamic studies rather than science. Textbooks provided by NGOs were also much more suitable for madressas rather than normal schools.



The history textbook for class three published by ARC mentioned in its chapter on world history the story of Noah's ark and that of Habil and Qabil; and it recounted the history of Afghanistan as:

Afghanistan is an Islamic country. The people of Afghanistan started believing in Islam about 1,400 years ago during the times of Hazrat Usman. And it is due to the blessings of Islam that the people of the country have lived peacefully since then. So in the light of the Qur'an and the teaching of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), we must strive protect and develop our religion and country till the end, and must follow our religion to the end of our lives.

There were 11 other independent Afghan organizations in Peshawar producing anti-Soviet literature and some translations from old history books. During this period, 129 books in Pushto were produced containing themes of Islam, fundamentalism, jihad, revolution, and resistance.

At the height of migration in the 1980's, children constituted nearly 50 per cent of the total Afghan refugee population in terms of numbers and it was estimated that 90 per cent of the refugees were from rural areas.

It was tragic and unfortunate that schools and all other educational institutions were used by both of the ideological regimes of Kabul and Islamabad in the 1980's and 1990's as a base for the recruitment of youth for the war. In fact one of the reasons why youth and adults alike left Afghanistan was a fear of conscription by any one of the groups, whether they were from the PDPA or Mujahideen. This had adverse effects on the minds of the youth — effects which can be felt even to this day. All objectives related to the development of the individual were superseded by new objectives to wage war against each other.

For instance, Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami recruited members from areas where tribal structures had broken down, or which were characterized by a mixture of groups from different tribes. The boys who grew up in refugee camps did not represent any existing social group inside Afghanistan. Thus, refugee parties depended on the revolutionary Islamic schools in the refugee camps of Pakistan for their recruits. Among the "Peshawar Seven" parties, the Hezb of Hekmatyar in particular gained access to these camps and built a network of schools with the aim of recruiting refugee youth. On the other hand, the key source of recruitment within Afghanistan for troops to fight against the *jihadis* were the government tribal boarding schools in Kabul, which taught an official ideology different from that of the popular culture.

It is also bizarre to note that both armies were funded by foreign sources running into billions of US dollars and Russian roubles, and by whatever the country could export at that time. The after-effects of these wars was that the education standard of both Afghanistan proper and that of the Afghan refugees suffered not only in terms of destruction of educational institutions, but also in terms of an orchestration of social evils in the minds of the children spiriting corruption and turning then: attention to "*jihad*" for solving political problems.

Education in the camps was directed at developing skills and attitudes needed for jihad. The whole curriculum was directed at achieving these objectives, a state of affairs which remains unchanged to date. This is a serious and major flaw in the education of Afghan refugees, who could otherwise have played a far more constructive role in bringing about positive changes in the curriculum of schools in the refugee camps.

Thus, the two groups, one supporting the Soviets and the other opposed to their invasion, fell victim through their struggles to a catastrophic idealism: two types of fundamentalism, that is, Marxism/Leninism-on the one hand and Islamic radicalism on the other. As a result, a large number of those who were fortunate enough to escape took their cause to the lands where they found refuge, while a considerable number of anti-PDPA regime conservatives were killed and imprisoned. The progressive elements faced the same fate in the period when the Mujahideen government ruled the roost.

One could see a similar phenomenon at work during the same period in the refugee camps of Pakistan. Here, refugee camp schools were used as centers to build up support for the cause of the resistance groups of the Mujahideen in the same way the communists did inside Afghan schools to propagate their ideology. The inclusion of the concept of *jihad* in the school curriculum linked to the University of Nebraska, Omaha, USA, is a clear example of this trend. Both strategies combined to bring about a disaster, unprecedented in Afghan history, vis-avis the development of education in the country, aggravating the war culture resulting in an avalanche of refugees. In this debacle, the USA cannot absolve itself of its past sins of creating extremists, fundamentalists and Osama bin Ladens.

With the assistance of Pakistan, *jihadi* refugee parties ran 250 schools with 43,000 students, enrolled in them and with 15,600 teachers and administrators. The graduates of these schools formed the core of Hekmatyar's force. Most of the Hezb leadership was a product of modern education received from Afghan universities. It is very strange and pathetic to note that all these products of the Afghan educational system and schools fought against each other to destroy their own nation.

On the other hand, a number of private schools were established and the number/ seems to be multiplying quickly, especially in the cities of Peshawar, Quetta and Islamabad. Although Islamabad had no refugee camps, nearly 30 private schools were functioning for Afghan children in that city which is an indication of the number of refugees living outside the camps. This is also a reflection of the quality of life of the refugees since they had to pay for the education of their children in these private schools. In addition, Afghans who were not in the refugee camps attended local Pakistani public and private schools. The daily *Frontier Post*, Peshawar, revealed that Afghan refugees have acquired a deep acumen in English reading, writing and speaking skills through a large number of English learning centres established in rented houses. The Afghans were interested in learning English in order to seek employment in the NGOs or for going abroad; psychological reasons are also listed as a cause for this interest. Thus, both in the camps and outside the level of interest and participation of the students in education was much higher than those inside Afghanistan.

It is also of interest to note that children in schools inside Afghanistan were following traditional forms of learning and that the number of schools either decreased or remained stagnant in all regions, whether controlled by the PDPA regime or by the Mujahideen. But educational opportunities on modern times for refugee children increased and widened in the NWFP. These included access to education in computer technology, English, business management, and other skill-development educational programmes.

Furthermore, accessibility of education for both sexes at all levels was another advantage the refugees enjoyed, with both a positive and negative impact on their attitudes. For many Afghan women, life in exile opened new horizons through contacts with people and things previously unknown in Afghanistan. Life in Pakistan virtually opened up a world of knowledge to most of the refugees and now, after the Bonn Conference, the Pakistani generation of Afghans is playing a constructive role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Even though children of refugees may not (or cannot) avail these opportunities, an awareness of the role of education and gender equality in education has emerged. This has exerted a great influence on the mindset of adults. It has developed positive attitudes in the Afghans and promoted behavioral change amongst adults.

Initially, funding for education from the UNHCR was confined to camps and limited to the primary stage. However, since¹ 1999 the UNHCR has provided nearly \$100,000 to the Afghan University established in Peshawar. On the other hand, over the last few years funding for refugees currently amounting to around \$700,000 (of which a particularly large amount came from the government of Japan) has declined affecting the education programmes.

Apart from the “refugee camp syndrome”, economic hardships, a culture of non-education *and* medical problems led to psychological -issues among Afghan refugee children. Most Afghan children have no idea of society and their role in it. They are only trained to fight and to kill. Commenting on the fallout of the Afghan war, the Afghan Youth Organization in the city of Quetta reported, “The new generation is a forgotten generation and its future is dark. Now the two monsters of militarism and mafia have opened their mouths to swallow them. They are forced to feed only by means of war, but the majority of the Afghan youth themselves wish to acquire education so that they can have a good standing in the new world order.”

In this process, refugee children developed a war psyche. The following true story from a classroom in a refugee camp in Pakistan depicts the picture:

The classroom was full of young Afghan boys armed with colored pencils and empty sheets of paper. They were told to draw pictures about their future, so from their memories and dreams they began to depict the scenes they imagined. The expected images picturized airplane pilots, helicopter gunship pilots, mujahideen with big guns, etc.

However, in the pile of papers, there was an image that came out as distinctly different from the others. It was a picture of bright flowers, some trees and a green garden. The teacher discovered that in this room full of future fighters, *mujahids* and pilots, there was only one who dreamt of becoming a gardener someday. The teacher asked: “How will you eat then and where will you get your from?” The answer was, “We rations.”

Rural populations have become urbanized in a sense and urban populations have had to give up a lot of advantages which they enjoyed in the cities and accept economic, social and other restrictions enforced by the war.

Strange cultures have been imposed on the future generation. The social life they adopted in the host countries, influenced by alien cultures, languages and customs was carried back to Afghanistan after their repatriation. This will become a cause of further fragmentation in the future.

A resolution which was adopted by an international hearing in Stockholm (1987) stated that “the children of Afghanistan are the forgotten ones in a war that has by and large been ignored. And yet, they are not only the principal victims, but also the future of the country ... Their physical wounds may perhaps heal within a year or so; the emotional and psychological trauma of the war will remain with the Afghans for generations.”

In a nutshell, the Afghan war brought about the decline of the traditional elite (the Pakhtoon aristocracy of tribal origin) and the rise of a new elite: Islamist intellectuals, mullahs and small warlords inside Afghanistan on the one hand, and the neo-fundamentalist “new intellectuals” among the emigrants to Pakistan on the other — all people who owe their emergence to the war and who, in some instances, have become “war entrepreneurs”, drawing sustenance from and by the war. The goods that circulated — arms, subsidies, humanitarian aid — came from abroad or from the government and were allocated according to political considerations. Thus, this network originated with the local capital or foreign resources. The new powers were made more secure by the internationalization of the war and the distribution network.