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Afghan refugees in Pakistan during the 1980s: Cold War politics and registration practice

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Introduction

The exodus of Afghans from their homeland during the domestic political upheavals in the 1970s and the ensuing occupation by the Soviet Union at Christmas 1979 made history as the largest refugee crisis in the world. Equally, it was the largest operation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the 1980s. Sadly, the crisis was not resolved together with the events which had originally caused it. Since the Soviet withdrawal in 1988-89, Afghanistan has remained instable, and new refugee flows have occurred in addition to those Afghans who have not yet been able to return to their country. Today, Afghans still represent the largest group of refugees in the world.

Despite the fact that the crisis continues unabatedly, some characteristics of the refugee situation were particular during the Cold War period. The UNHCR's work as a purely humanitarian organization and its role in the politically charged environment of the Cold War are at the centre of the joint research project "UNHCR and the Global Cold War" of the UNHCR, the Geneva Centre for Security Studies, and the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, which examines the archival material of the UNHCR from 1971 to 1984.[1] One particular Cold War issue, which has drawn attention in the past, is the procedure of registration for the Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

As host country to the largest group of Afghan refugees, Pakistan had to deal with a gargantuan task of administering the relief and livelihood of over 3 million refugees. UNHCR, as the custodian of the international refugee regime, was the natural partner for this undertaking, and cooperation between the Government of Pakistan (GOP) and UNHCR was close. The sociological and political aspects of the political organization and mechanisms in Afghan refugee camps, officially referred to as "Afghan Refugee Villages" (ARVs),[2] in Pakistan have been treated in some detail.[3] The recently review of declassified documents from the UNHCR archives led to a revisit of the issue and allows to put it into the larger perspective of Cold War politics and UNHCR engagement in Pakistan. This

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This paper is based on the author's DEA thesis, *UNHCR and the Global Cold War: National Interest vs. Humanitarian Mandate: Assistance to Afghan Refugees in Pakistan during the Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan*, submitted in August 2007 to the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva. This thesis includes a more comprehensive presentation of the political background, as well as a more extensive interpretation of the archival material.

[1] Documents from this collection will be introduced as belonging to UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2; for more information on the research project, see http://hei.unige.ch/sections/hp/UNHCRProject.htm.

[2] P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *The Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: A Nation in Exile*, Current Sociology, Vol. 36, No. 2, June 1988, p.73; the authors explain that the "persons responsible for the administration of the refugees, as well as the refugees themselves, speak of 'camps'"; the term "refugee village" instead of "camp" was carefully chosen to avoid the military connotations of the term "camp" (A. Stahel, interview with the author, 6 June 2007); the UNHCR documents also often refer to the camps as "RTV", for "Refugee Tented Village"; cf. also L. Dupree, "Afghanistan in 1982: Still no Solution", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 23, No. 2, A survey of Asia in 1982: Part II, February 1983, p.135.

[3] Cf. e.g. P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, "Hommes d'Influence et Hommes de Partis: l'Organisation Politique dans les Villages de Réfugiés Afghans au Pakistan", in: E. Grötzbach (Ed), *Neue Beiträge zur Afghanistanforschung*, Liestal: Bibliotheca Afghanica, pp.29-46; P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, "The Afghan Refugee in Pakistan: An Ambiguous Identity", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1988, pp.141-152; O. Roy, *L'Afghanistan. Islam et Modernité Politique,* Paris, Seuil, 1985, pp.164ff; B. R. Rubin, "Country Reports, Afghanistan: The Forgotten Crisis", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1996, pp.17-19; B. R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*, New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 1995, pp.179ff.

article will examine how Pakistan's refugee policy was shaped by the political setting of the Afghanistan conflict, and how the registration procedures put in place by the Pakistani authorities came about and affected the work of UNHCR.

In order to better understand the particular characteristics of this refugee situation, it will be useful to first review the Cold War context in which it occurred. This review will be followed by an examination of the political organization of the Afghans in Pakistan, which formed the basis for the refugee registration procedures applied in Pakistan. These procedures will then be scrutinized with a particular view on its effects on the work of the UNHCR and, in particular, on its practice of refugee registration.

The Cold War in South Asia

The late 1970s, and particularly the 1980s, saw a change in superpower relations. With the onset of the "Second Cold War", i.e. the deterioration of the Soviet-US relations and the end of the period of détente that had shaped the superpower relations during the late 1960s and far into the 1970s,[4] the international community witnessed a growing number of regional conflicts that were either triggered or fuelled and perpetuated by superpower involvement. The superpower competition regained an intensity that it had lost in the 1960s.[5] The so-called *Reagan Doctrine*[6] eventually led to a shift from the traditional strategic concept of containment to a more proactive stance in the support of insurgent movements, supposed "freedom fighters" fighting Soviet-backed regimes in the developing world.[7]

This close relation between local or national actors, be it national governments or national liberation movements, on the one hand, and the superpowers on the other, led to fuelling of ethnic or local conflicts by military, logistic, and ideological assistance and engendered the internationalization of civil wars, not only in Afghanistan, but also in places as divers as Indochina, Central America, the Horn of Africa, Southern Africa, and West Asia.[8] In these situations, refugees often became "pawns in geopolitical games to destabilize regimes and to encourage insurgency in their countries of origin".[9]

As world wide refugee numbers continued to rise, refugee receiving states often were no longer able to manage the refugee flows on their own and demanded UNHCR's assistance. Consequently, these new and externally fuelled conflicts meant a growing involvement of UNHCR particularly in places like Africa and South or Southeast Asia where the block confrontation was played out. Originally founded with a clear focus on Europe and on

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[4] M. Cox, "From the Truman Doctrine to the Second Superpower Detente: The Rise and Fall of the Cold War". *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1990, pp.34-5.

[5] S. Talbott, "U.S.-Soviet Relations: From Bad to Worse", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 3, 1979, p.520.

[6] What has become known as the *Reagan Doctrine* is best expressed in his following statement in which he calls upon the US to stand up against the USSR: "We must stand by all our democratic allies". And we must not break faith with those who are risking their lives—on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua—to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth." (R. Reagan, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union*, 6 February 1985).

[7] G. Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics. A Perilous Path*, Oxford & New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.214; B. R. Rubin *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, *op.cit*, p.2.

[8] A. Suhrke and K. Newland, "UNHCR: Uphill Into the Future", *International Migration Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2001, p.289; N. Bwakira, "From Nansen to Ogata: UNHCR's Role in a Changing World", *International Migration Review,* Vol. 35, No. 1, Spring 2001, p.279.

[9] UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees 2000. Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.7.

individuals becoming refugees due to events occurring previous to its own creation,[10] the UNHCR had throughout the 1960s and 1970s expanded its reach and operations into Africa, Asia, and the Americas. This expansion was sanctioned in 1967 by the *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, which eliminated the temporal and geographic restrictions to the mandate.[11]

In view of the interests and involvement of the superpowers in regional conflicts, a great challenge for UNHCR was to keep these rapidly increasing humanitarian relief operations clearly separated from political, economic, or military motivations. As most of its funding, and many of its staff members, came from Western countries, this superpower involvement raised the suspicion of a pro-Western bias, and thus heightened the political pressure on UNHCR, while it intervened in favour of persons displaced as a consequence of the proxy wars.[12]

A vivid example of these political connotations of UNHCR's humanitarian work is the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in late 1979. It exacerbated the refugee flows that had already been significant under the communist regime in Kabul, particular after the coup of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1978.[13] This Soviet intervention has to be understood as a reaction to both the internal stability of the Afghan regime, and the perceived threats of growing external influence. However, it was arguably this invasion itself that triggered a vast increase in external intervention from the United States (US) and its allies, notably, of course, Pakistan, but also other Muslim countries in the Middle East as well as China. For the Soviet Union (USSR), the Afghan refugees were a liability and served as living witnesses against the viciousness and failures of the new regime.

It is therefore pertinent, from a purely strategic point of view, that the Afghan and Soviet leadership pressed for the forcible repatriation of the Afghans, whom they did not recognize as refugees.[14] The interdiction of forced repatriation, or *refoulement*,[15] lies, however, at the centre of the international refugee protection regime. The UNHCR's operation in Pakistan, funded by the Western states – with the US as its major donor[16] –, and taking care of a refugee population originating in a communist country, was reminiscent of the Cold War context of its creation. This clear antagonism left the refugees trapped in the middle and made them the victims of political instrumentalization. The issue of registration with its particularities in Pakistan has to be understood in this context.

Afghan refugees in Pakistan

For Pakistan, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a chance to break out of its international isolation, which had been caused by its notorious human rights record as well as its nuclear research. As Pakistan's strategic importance changed and it became the only reliable neighbour of Afghanistan after the fall of the Shah in Iran in 1979, these

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[10] *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees,* Art. 1(B).

[11] *1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, Art. 1(3).

[12] UNHCR, *World's Refugees, op.cit.* p.105.

[13] for an overview of the rising numbers, cf. R. Schöch, *UNHCR and the Global Cold War, op.cit.*, pp.41-42.

[14] UNHCR, "Cable from the UNDP Resident Representative: Recent Developments with the Afghanistan Refugees in Pakistan", by M. Priestley, 2 Aug 1979, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG "Refugees from Afghanistan in Pakistan" [Vol. 3] 1979, Folio 113A.

[15] The rule of non-refoulement is the interdiction of forced return of refugees "to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion." *1951 Convention*, Art. 33(1).

[16] E.g. UNHCR, *UNHCR: Annual Report 1980,* Geneva, Author, 1981 30, 81.

problematic issues faded, in the view of Western policy makers, in comparison with Pakistan's significance for the resistance against the Soviet backed communist regime in Kabul.[17] President Zia ul-Haq suddenly became an important partner for the US and its allies in making Pakistan a bulwark against communist expansion, a safe haven for the refugees fleeing the communist regime in Afghanistan,[18] and a key player for any political or military solution of the Afghanistan conflict.[19]

In this context, the control of the Afghan refugees was an important asset for President Zia. The refugee issue had long before the Soviet intervention played a role in the relations between the two countries,[20] both countries customarily accusing the other of providing refuge for criminals and separatist trouble-makers.[21] There is a long history of territorial conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan regarding the Pashtun and Baluch tribal territories, which had been separated in Afghan and Pakistani parts by the Durant line. It was across this mountainous frontier with its more than 200 mountain passes that the masses of refugees fled to Pakistan, and the Afghan resistance fighters crossed back into Afghanistan.

The Soviet invasion "effectively simplified and polarized Pakistani-Afghan relations".[22] The Soviet occupation pitted Pakistan, together with a coalition of Afghan resistance movements[23] in a common fight against the foreign intruder, despite the underlying tribal, ethnic, and national rivalries.[24] With the help of some political manipulation by the GOP, the Islamic concept of *jihād* became the leitmotif of the Afghans in exile, whose traditional social order had until then had little place for Islam.[25] This is why the Afghan resistance fighters have become known as *mujāhideen*, i.e. fighters in a *jihād*.

UNHCR's involvement

In UNHCR's archival collection, the refugee issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan can be traced back to 1975, where documents illustrate both the traditional permeability of the border and the politicization of population movements.[26] Nevertheless, Pakistan continued to receive and care for the Afghans on its territory. When its own resources became strained, the government asked UNHCR for help but insisted to keep the UNHCR involvement as inconspicuous as possible and to retain the full control of the refugee

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[17] J. Isaacs, *The Cold War: Soldiers of God,* 20/24, Film/Documentary, CNN, min.16.

[18] G. Loescher, *Perilous Path*, *op.cit.*, p.216; A. Stahel and P. Bucherer. *Afghanistan 1986/87. Internationale Strategische Lage und Sowjetisierung Afghanistans,* Frauenfeld: Huber & Co, 1987, p.3.

[19] F. Grare, *Le Pakistan Face au Conflit Afghan (1979-1985). Au Tournant de la Guerre Froide,* Paris and Montreal, L'Harmattan, 1997, pp.97, 111.

[20] e.g. UNHCR, 23 January 1975, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 1; *ibid.*, 18 April 1975, folio 5; *ibid.*, 16 August 1978, folio 14; UNHCR, 4 December 1979, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 600-PAK, folio 64, p.2; *ibid.*, 16 April 1980, folio 67, p.1.

[21] e.g. UNHCR, 6 September 1979, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 127.

[22] R. Martin, "Regional Dynamics and the Security of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No.1, pp.71-78, 2000, p.73.

[23] This coalition was loose, fragile and changing, but some degree of cooperation was achieved with the help of Pakistan.

[24] R. Martin, *Regional Dynamics*, *op.cit.*, p.73; M. Yousaf and M. Atkin, *Afghanistan: The Bear Trap. The Defeat of a Superpower*, 2nd Edition, Barnsley, L. Cooper, 2001, p. 33.

[25] O. Roy, *La Laïcité Face à l'Islam*, Paris, Editions Stock, 2005, p.90.

[26] e.g. UNHCR, 23 January 1975, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 1; *ibid.*, 18 April 1975, folio 5; *ibid.*, 16 August 1978, folio 14; UNHCR, 4 December 1979, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 600-PAK, folio 64, p.2; *ibid.*, 16 April 1980, folio 67, p.1.

operations.[27] With the Soviet intervention in late 1979, it became evident that the crisis would not be resolved in the short term. UNHCR established a permanent office in Pakistan in January 1980 and started what was to become "the largest assistance programme ever undertaken" by UNHCR.[28] Eventually, there were up to around three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan.[29] Beyond the supplying of relief goods like shelter, clothing, food and fuel, UNHCR's activities ranged from providing building material for the camps and water supply, to veterinary services for the refugees' about 3 million livestock and non-material assistance like education and training.[30]

During the late 1970s, the Pakistani authorities managed the refugees by delegating their administration to the respective provinces. When this modus became inadequate due to the rising numbers of refugees, the post of Chief Commissioner for Afghan Refugees was created in February 1980 in Islamabad.[31] His office was attached to the States and Frontier Regions Division, which was under the direct responsibility of Zia. It oversaw a bureaucracy of 6-7'000 staff,[32] who controlled the refugees in most aspects from policy decision to camp administration.[33] These officers were also responsible for administering all UN aid, so that UNHCR was never directly responsible for the refugees in Pakistan, but had to work through the national authorities.[34]

When Pakistan asked for UNHCR assistance in April 1979, it insisted that the aid was channelled through the GOP.[35] The Pakistani authorities wanted to remain in control of the refugees and to be the only intermediary between the refugees and the International Organizations, including UNHCR.[36] This approach was perpetuated during the 1980s, despite the growing scope of the UNHCR operation. It was also due to the relatively small number of UNHCR personnel, i.e. some dozens of employees, that UNHCR had to rely on the much larger Pakistani administration,[37] but this necessarily meant a certain limit to the control of its funds.

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[27] UNHCR, 10 April 1979, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 69; cf. R. Schöch, *UNHCR and the Global Cold War*, *op.cit.*, pp.50-58.

[28] UNHCR, May 1983, Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 560, p.8 paragraph 28.

[29] About the same number of Afghans is estimated to have fled to Iran, bringing the total of Afghan refugees worldwide to over six million in the 1980s, and 6.3 million in 1990 according to UNHCR, *World's Refugees, op.cit.* p.116; considering the difficulties of registering the refugees, these numbers have to be largely understood as estimates.

[30] UNHCR, "Dossier: Afghans in Pakistan", *Refugees Magazine*, No. 2, January 1983, pp.10, 13ff.

[31] F. Grare, "The Geopolitics of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan", in: S. J. Stedman and F. Tanner (Eds), *Refugee Manipulation. War Politics and the Abuse of Human Suffering,* Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2003, p.68.

[32] *Ibid.*; UNHCR, *Afghans in Pakistan*, *op.cit.* p.11; Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont put the number at 9'000 (*Hommes d'Influence*, *op.cit.,* p.31).

[33] F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action,* London, Cornell University Press, 2002, p.67; for the organization and administrative structure of the refugee villages cf. P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Hommes d'Influence, op.cit.*; and G. Rizvi, "Field Report. The Afghan Refugees: Hostages in the Struggle for Power", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1984, pp.45-6; for the working relationship between UNHCR and the Pakistani authorities, cf. e.g. UNHCR, May 1983, Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 560, pp.5-8.

[34] F. Grare, *Geopolitics of Afghan Refugees*, *op.cit.* p.73.

[35] UNHCR, 10 April 1979, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 69

[36] Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont, *Hommes d'Influence*, *op.cit.*, p.31

[37] *Ibid.*

Political organization

It can be said that the relationship between the Afghan refugees and the government of Pakistan, which drew the refugees into the "great game"[38] of superpower relations in South Asia, was to some extent a mutually beneficial one: The refugees enjoyed the generosity of their host, while the host profited politically, economically, and militarily from their presence,[39] notably in the form of support from the US, which had a major stake in the conflict. But the refugees did not only allow Pakistan to muster external support. Pakistan also intended to use these refugees more directly to position itself favourably with respect to the dispute with Afghanistan.

Stahel states that the *mujāhideen* of the Afghan resistance did not have any policy of their own, but that their objectives and activities were shaped and guided by Pakistan, more specifically the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's military intelligence service.[40] Pakistan achieved this control by using a number of Afghan political parties, which evolved as intermediaries between the Afghan resistance on the one hand, and the Pakistani authorities and international governments on the other.[41] After the coup of Mohammed Daoud Khan, cousin of the King, in 1973, the political Islamic movements started to go into exile in Peshawar, the capital of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).

Former Prime Minister Bhutto's government welcomed and supported them,[42] although he did not share their mostly Islamist ideology.[43] His reasons were twofold: The Islamic and Islamist movements were the only Afghan factions that had supported Pakistan in the 1971 war against India; and Bhutto sought to use them as a tool against Kabul in the territorial disputes about "Pashtunistan" and Baluchistan.[44] When they failed to provoke a general uprising against the Afghan government and an Islamist takeover that Pakistan had hoped for in Afghanistan in 1975, the leadership of the Islamist resistance definitely established their exile basis in Peshawar.[45]

After the PDPA took over in Kabul, and particularly after the Soviet invasion, the Pakistani support for these groups became more systematic. The GOP intended to control not only the Islamic movement, but all the Afghan refugees through a system of patronage. This project was complicated by the fact that there as a plethora of parties; the Afghan pride led to a situation were one would rather create a new party than surrender to an existing one.[46] Consequently, by making membership of one of the seven parties that were deemed most useful a precondition for Pakistani support, the GOP simplified the system for their purposes. The parties recognized for assistance by the GOP became known as the "seven parties" of Peshawar, three of them traditionalist, moderate, and Islamic, four of them

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[38] From the title of an article by D. Fromkin, 1980, "The Great Game in Asia", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Spring), pp.936-951.
[39] F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.*, p.66.
[40] Stahel, interview with the author, 2007.
[41] cf. O. Roy, *L'Afghanistan*, *op.cit.*, p.168.
[42] F. Terry *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.*, p.56; some newspaper report training of Afghan resistance fighters in former Pakistani military bases as early as 1978: N. Nazim, *La Situation en Afghanistan, Son Règlement Politique et les Efforts de Paix des Nations Unies (1978-1989),* Basel, Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 2003, p.81.
[43] B. R. Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan. From Buffer State to Failed State*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995, p.27.
[44] cf. p.6 above.
[45] B. R. Rubin, *Search for Peace, op.cit.*, p.27; F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat, op.cit.*, p.56.
[46] A. Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan, A Modern History: Monarchy, Despotism or Democracy? The Problems of Governance in the Muslim Tradition,* London/New York, Tauris, 2003, p.103.

Islamist.[47] These parties had been politically insignificant both in Afghanistan and for the Afghans in Pakistan throughout most of the 1970s.[48] They had no military prowess and little or no territorial basis inside Afghanistan to support their claims of fighting on behalf of the Afghan population.[49] Their membership, previously counted rather in the hundreds than in the thousands, started to increase following the PDPA's coup in 1978, and their influence grew only after they began receiving massive outside support following the Soviet invasion.[50]

The existence alone of the refugees generally bestows a certain amount of legitimacy upon the resistance:

> Refugees constitute a legitimizing population for the warriors. The presence of a large population in exile is taken as a physical testimony of support for the warriors, at least in the sense that they represent a rejection of the other side in the conflict.[51]

The relatively tight administrative structures of such a highly concentrated settlement like a refugee village or camp could be used to control the civil population. The Afghan parties "used the refugees to gain international recognition and funding by posing as their legitimate representatives".[52] This legitimacy was reinforced, in turn, by the support they received both from the Pakistani authorities and from the international community. In turn for their loyalty, Islamabad allowed the parties "great latitude in managing political affairs within the Afghan community", where they "maintained a compliant social order among refugees."[53]

On the other hand, the parties also quashed political dissent, sometimes with ruthless methods, as the reports of violence, abductions, and disappearances in the ARVs demonstrate.[54] Although neither the GOP nor the ISI had any institutionalized control over these Afghan parties in exile, they were able to shape their action and policies by allocating or withholding supplies for specific parties, in a strategy of incentives (supplies) and disincentives (withholding supplies).[55] Most effective as incentives were arms supplies.[56] The ISI used this tool in its strategy to facilitate the heterogeneous Afghan population's

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[47] cf. e.g. O. Roy, *L'Afghanistan*, *op.cit.*, pp.149-174; UNHCR, *Afghanistan: The Forgotten Crisis*, *op.cit.*, pp.16-19; or T. Amin, "Afghan Resistance: Past, Present, and Future", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 4, April 1984, pp.382-386; Dupree, *Still no Solution*, *op.cit.* p.142 (Note 6).

[48] O. Roy, *L'Afghanistan*, *op.cit.*, p.168.

[49] F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.*, p.67; with one exception, they had no territorial base in Afghanistan: F. Grare, *Le Pakistan*, *op.cit.*, p.103.

[50] F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.*, p.56; However, as F. Grare (*Le Pakistan, op.cit.*, p.105) specifies, the influence of the Peshawar-based parties on the population in Afghanistan remained insignificant.

[51] A. R. Zolberg, A. Suhrke and S. Aguayo, *Escape from Violence. Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World*, Oxford et al., Oxford University Press, 1989, p.277; cf. also F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.*, p.63.

[52] F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.*, p.67; cf. also G. Loescher, *Perilous Path*, *op.cit.*, p.215; S. J. Stedman and F. Tanner, *Refugee Manipulation*, *op.cit.*, p.9.

[53] R. Martin, *Regional Dynamics*, *op.cit.*, p.76.

[54] UNHCR, 2 July 1983, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 467; UNHCR, 18 November 1982, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 533; UNHCR, 22 February 1983, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 549A.

[55] F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.*, p.67

[56] F. Grare, *Le Pakistan*, *op.cit.*, p.104; M. Yousaf and M. Atkin, *Bear Trap*, *op.cit.*, pp.103ff.

political organization and coordination – always vigilant that Pakistan ultimately remained in control.[57]

Registration procedures in Pakistan

When UNHCR started its work in the 1950s, refugee status determination was based on criteria which were clearly defined in the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*[58] (subsequently 1951 *Refugee Convention*). Recognition of refuge status was usually granted upon examination of each individual's situation and personal history. This mechanism was an important shift from the pre-Second World War practice of designating certain ethnic or national groups as refugees on an *ad* With its global expansion, the UNHCR practices had to be adapted to new refugee situations. Rather than with individuals or small groups, the UNHCR was faced with often massive refugee flows, notably in Africa and South and Southeast Asia.

With a sharp increase of the numbers of persons of concern for UNHCR, it had to revert to what has become known as *prima facie* recognition of certain groups of persons sharing the same circumstances of persecution and flight. Individual cases were still examined to the extent possible, but the *prima facie* recognition allowed UNHCR to manage the mass exoduses that would have been impossible to manage on a case-by-case basis. With the *prima facie* recognition, persons belonging to a group determined as falling under the UNHCR mandate were automatically recognized unless there was evidence that disqualified him to be granted refugee status under the 1951 *Refugee Convention*.[60]

However, for the GOP, controlling the Afghan refugee population on its territory was an important political asset. To safeguard this control it strove to be directly in charge of the external help to the refugees. In fact, the GOP's precondition for granting UNHCR access to its territory was that all aid was channelled through the Pakistani authorities. In order to coordinate the distribution of relief goods a well as the services in the ARVs for such a large number of refugees, the especially created Commission for Afghan Refugees selected refugee representatives, the so called *māleks. Māleks* were traditional village notables in Afghanistan, but their position was now reshaped as an intermediary between the refugees and the administration.[61] Among other tasks, they were responsible for the redistribution of food rations among the families.

Due to abuses and in order to avoid the *māleks* benefiting to the detriment of the ordinary refugees, UNHCR put pressure on the Commission "to have distributions carried out directly to heads of families".[62] Consequently, the Pakistani authorities created a passport, containing the particulars of the head of family and the respective family members and entitling these members to assistance.[63] In order to ensure that the refugee population

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[57] O. Roy, *L'Afghanistan*, *op.cit.*, 168; if needed, the Pakistanis could always apply a divide and rule approach, playing on the tribal rivalries which were only superficially bridged by the religious shaping of the resistance; F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.,* pp.58, 61.

[58] 1951 *Convention*.

[59] This practice is exemplified in the assistance to ethnic Greek refugees from Turkey in 1922: UNHCR, *World's Refugees, op.cit.,* p.15.

[60] cf. 1951 C*onvention*, Art. 1(C)-(F); s. also A. Zolberg, A. Suhrke and S. Aguayo, *Escape from Violence*, *op.cit.,* p.276.

[61] P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Hommes d'Influence*, *op.cit.* pp.34-35.

[62] P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Dumont, *A Nation in Exile*, *op.cit.* p.82; P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Hommes d'Influence*, *op.cit.* p.35; UNHCR, 19 March 1984, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 110-PAK, folio 84, p.8.

[63] F. Grare, *Geopolitics of Afghan Refugees*, *op.cit.,* p.75.

would serve its own political objectives, the GOP determined that such a passport was issued only if the refugees could produce certified proof of affiliation with one of the Afghan political parties recognized by the GOP.[64] In other words, Pakistan requested every refugee to register with one of these seven parties in order to be recognized as refugees and thus become eligible for assistance.[65] According to a Pakistani relief official, refugees who did not belong to any party could, in reality, receive aid, "but it [was] much more difficult for them, without this connection, to find their way through the bureaucracy."[66]

In addition, the parties were used by the Pakistani refugee authorities to keep track of new arrivals.[67] They were responsible for a preliminary security screening of the new arrivals; the results of the screening were subsequently communicated to the Pakistani authorities.[68] Thus, all those Afghans who were designated by the parties to be a security threat were automatically barred from recognition as refugees.[69]

For their part, each of the parties tried to register as many members among the refugees as possible, to increase their power and their basis of negotiation for more supplies from the Pakistani authorities and the Western powers,[70] thus turning camp structures into important tools of influence over the refugees.[71] Between them, the seven parties controlled all ARVs, except for the illegal camps, which existed mainly in the tribal areas and around the Khyber Pass.[72] Beyond the organization of material assistance, individuals without party affiliation, and thus without refugee identity card, were often suspected of being agents of the Afghan intelligence service KhAD; their freedom of movement was severely restricted; and they had no access to employment.[73]

Consequently, "membership of a party [was] an absolutely general phenomenon and the possession of a membership card of a party, or even several, is normal."[74] This system gave political parties "a veto over whether a refugee will receive assistance and turns refugee aid into a political patronage plum."[75] Thus, the UNHCR practice of *prima facie* recognition was effectively suspended[76] and UNHCR reduced to a bystander whose hands were bound when it came to refugee registration. The Afghans were not received in Pakistan as refugees fleeing persecution in their own country, but rather as "partisan holy warriors in a struggle against atheist tyranny", and accepted practically under the condition of their outspoken opposition against the regime in Kabul.[77]

The political parties' claim to leadership, and thus their role in the Pakistani registration and control system, was strengthened by the fact that the exiled Islamist parties could bring

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[64] *Ibid*.

[65] B. R. Rubin *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, *op.cit,* p.202; UNHCR, 14 April 1983, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 110-PAK, folio 37, pp.1-2.

[66] J. Rone, *By all Parties to the Conflict. Violations of the Law of War in Afghanistan,* New York and Washington D.C., U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee and Asian Watch Committee, 1988, p.90.

[67] *Ibid*.

[68] *Ibid*.

[69] UNHCR, 14 April 1983, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 110-PAK, folio 37, pp.2-3; J. Rone, *By all Parties to the Conflict*, *op.cit.*, p.90.

[70] F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.,* p.67.

[71] cf. P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Hommes d'Influence*, *op.cit.,* pp.41-43.

[72] A. Stahel, interview with the author, 2007.

[73] F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.,* p.68.

[74] P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Hommes d'Influence*, *op.cit.,* p.38 (translation of the author).

[75] J. Rone, *By all Parties to the Conflict*, *op.cit.*, p.90; cf. also P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Hommes d'Influence*, *op.cit.,* p.33ff:

[76] R. Martin, *Regional Dynamics*, *op.cit.*, p.74.

[77] *Ibid*., p.78.

forth religious arguments for the resistance against the communist regime in Kabul. Some of the parties promoted the view that it was a religious duty to leave the country under the control of a communist government, which they considered atheist.[78] According to this interpretation, "[t]he Soviet intervention transformed the fight of rural areas against a modernist government into a holy war, pitting the overwhelming majority of the Afghan people against the atheists from the North."[79] This holy war, or *jihād,* had been "declared jointly by the resistance parties in Peshawar" on 27 November 1979, i.e. even before the all-out invasion by Soviet forces.[80] The religious dimension of the conflict was supported by the growing numbers of religious schools, or *madrasa,*[81] in and around the ARVs, where the new generation was introduced to Islamist ideology.[82]

 This ideology, shaping both the self-perception and the way of perceiving the surrounding world,[83] presented the Afghan refugees with a concept of identity different from the one shaped by the tribal custom of migration and hospitality.[84] One part of this religious identity is that of the *mujāhid.*[85] Since this identity was widely propagated and accepted among the resistance, the Afghan resistance fighters have generally become known as *mujāhideen* (plural of *mujāhid*). The other – complementary – part of the identity is the concept of *muhājir*, i.e. someone who has "willingly migrated to uphold the cause of God".[86] This kind of migration should not be confused with resignation, but was understood, in the ideological framework applied, as a "momentary tactical retreat preceding return and reconquest".[87]

In the beliefs of some Afghan leaders, it was "recognized as religiously precedented and sanctioned by the Prophet Mohammad's flight (*hejrat*) from Mecca to Medina to escape persecution by his own kinsmen."[88] These religious notions of identity were emphasised in the *madrasa* of the resistance parties, some of which even offered paramilitary training for refugee children.[89]

The Pakistani Refugee Commission also described the Afghan refugees in these religious terms.[90] Accordingly, many of the Afghan resistance fighters assumed this conflation of the two facades of identity and would "call themselves *mujāhid* when they are on the point of leaving to fight in Afghanistan and *muhājir* when they are just arriving in Pakistan."[91] This changing of roles corresponded with the situation in Afghanistan itself, where "the

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[78] P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Ambiguous Identity*, *op.cit.,* p.141; after initially claiming to respect the religion, the regime in Kabul changed the national flag from (Islamic) green to red in October 1979, which was perceived as a formal pronunciation of the atheist nature of the regime; cf. F. Grare, *Le Pakistan*, *op.cit.,* p.99; D. Turton and P. Marsden, "Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan", *Issues Paper Series*, Kabul, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2002, p.10.

[79] Allan and Stahel 1983, *Tribal Guerrilla Warfare Against a Colonial Power. Analyzing the War in Afghanistan, p.598*; cf. D. Turton and P. Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride, op.cit.,* p.10.

[80] A. Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*, Richmond, Surrey, Curzon Press, 1995, p.276.

[81] Religious schools, often run by or connected to a mosque.

[82] D. Turton and P. Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride, op.cit.,* p.11.

[83] A. Olesen, *Islam and Politics, op.cit.*, p.276.

[84] cf. P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Ambiguous Identity*, *op.cit.,* pp.141, 144.

[85] Singular of *mujāhideen.*

[86] A. Olesen, *Islam and Politics, op.cit.*, p.277.

[87] P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Ambiguous Identity*, *op.cit.,* p.146.

[88] D. Edwards, "Marginality and Migration: Cultural Dimensions of the Afghan Refugee Problem", *International Migration Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Special Issue: Refugees: Issues and Directions, Summer 1986, p.316.

[89] P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Ambiguous Identity*, *op.cit.,* p.150.

[90] S. Zaman, *Humanitarian Assistance Programme for Afghan Refugees in North West Frontier Province, Pakistan,* Peshawar, Afghan Refugee Commissionerate, 1985, pp.1-2, 47.

[91] P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Ambiguous Identity*, *op.cit.,* p.146 (italics in the original).

resistance was not the business of a handful of *mujāhideen* but the entire population" who took turns between weeks of fighting and returning back to family life.[92] Families in ARVs would often have one male member fighting in Afghanistan, who was then replaced by another after some weeks of fighting. It has to be noted, that the recruitment was generally not coercive, since it was considered both a duty and an honour to fight the *jihād*.[93]

While supporting the religious argument for the Afghan resistance parties, the notion that the *muhājir* has not given up the struggle but is a *mujāhid* in waiting, makes this concept incompatible with a central provision of the international refugee regime, which excludes active combatants from refugee status.[94] Moreover, the shifting identities made it all but impossible to make a clear distinction between refugees and active combatants.

This system of registration led to constant tension between the parties and UNHCR: The former sought collective control of the refugees, while the latter tried in vain to address the needs of the families individually and on a humanitarian basis.[95] The UNHCR's statute, however, stresses that the refugee regime should be enacted according to humanitarian criteria alone. Article 2 of this statute stipulates that "[t]he work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character; it shall be humanitarian and social".[96]

The term "humanitarian", in the context of the UN's work, is "understood as all measures intended to relieve acute distress of groups of people", and "[t]he guiding principles of UN humanitarian assistance are the principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality."[97] Lischer specifies that "[i]mpartiality is understood as the consideration of need as the only criterion in aid distribution. Neutrality means that organizations do not take sides in the conflict."[98] All actors involved in humanitarian assistance, including the UNHCR, should not, therefore, pursue any political, economic, or military objectives, and have an interest in clearly distinguishing humanitarian operations from any political, economic, and military assistance.[99]

Without going into the legal details, it appears evident that the humanitarian principles of UNHCR's mandate have been violated with the registration practice in Pakistan: The required membership of political parties, particularly parties which support the resistance against the government of a neighbouring state, includes a political bias in the recognition of refugees; and the individual registration requirement cancels the *prima facie* group recognition of the Afghan refugees. In summary, the provisions of the international refugee regime were turned upside-down.

The description of the Afghans in Pakistan as a "refugee-warrior community"[100] captures a central contradiction: Just as the humanitarian organisations that support them, refugees are

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[92] C. Ponfilly and J. Bony, *Une Vallée Contre un Empire,* Film/Documentary. Antenne 2/Gresh Productions, min.28 (Translation by the author).

[93] P. Allan and A. Stahel, "Tribal Guerrilla Warfare Against a Colonial Power. Analyzing the War in Afghanistan", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1983, p.599.

[94] for the legal argument, cf. A. Zolberg, A. Suhrke and S. Aguayo, *Escape from Violence, op.cit.,* p.276.

[95] F. Grare, *Geopolitics of Afghan Refugees, op.cit.,* p.75.

[96] UN General Assembly 1950, *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, A/RES/428*, Annex, Chapter 1, Art. 2.

[97] G. K. Swamy, "Humanitarian Assistance", in: H. Volger (Ed), *A Concise Encyclopaedia of the United Nations,* The Hague, London und New York, Kluwer Law International, 2002, p.260.

[98] S. Lischer, "Collateral Damage. Humanitarian Assistance as a Cause of Conflict", *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2003, p.81.

[99] G. K. Swamy, *Humanitarian Assistance, op.cit.,* p.260.

[100] *Ibid*., p.254.

expected not to interfere in political and military problems from which they had fled.[101] Therefore, it was UNHCR's task to "distinguish clearly fighters from expatriated victims",[102] while, at the same time, the close cohabitation of fighters and civilians and the shifting identities of the refugees, as well as the limited resources of the UNHCR personnel in the field, made this distinction particularly difficult to make. Lischer underlines that the primary responsibility to ensure refugee security and to maintaining the civilian character of refugee-populated areas lay with the host state.[103] UNHCR simply did not have the capacities to separate combatants from refugees,[104] as its mandate was shaped for the protection of individuals in quite different circumstances.

Underlying political motives

Supporting the seven parties served several of Zia's objectives at the same time. By requiring allegiance with one of the parties, both for the commanders of the resistance to receive supplies[105] and for the refugees to receive assistance, his strategy tried to further three main objectives: First, it was aimed at controlling the entire Afghan population, including the resistance in exile, and directing their interests towards Afghanistan and away from Pakistan's domestic politics,[106] since Zia feared a "palestinisation" of the refugee population, i.e. their meddling in domestic affairs.[107] Second, he hoped to be able to influence the creation of a "government in Afghanistan that would be weak and subservient to Pakistan to assure that there would never be any threat to Pakistan from that side."[108]

Therefore, on the one hand, it was important to give the resistance an appearance of unity through Islam to increase their fervour and efficiency, and to support the diplomatic efforts of the US and Saudi Arabia against the USSR.[109] On the other hand, the underlying objective of General Zia was to keep the political power of the Afghan leaders under control and suppress the Pashtun nationalist aspirations, since he was convinced that an Islamist government in Kabul would denounce the irredentist Pashtun demands and thus at least implicitly recognize the Durant line as national frontier.[110] And lastly, Zia saw in a potential Islamic or Islamist influence in Afghanistan a possibility to weaken the axis Kabul-Delhi and thus reduce the dangers of a two-front confrontation.[111]

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[101] P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Hommes d'Influence, op.cit.,* p.31.

[102] P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, *Ambiguous Identity*, *op.cit.,* p.150.

[103] S. Lischer, *Collateral Damage*, *op.cit.,* p.96; S. J. Stedman and F. Tanner, *Refugee Manipulation*, *op.cit.,* p.X; in a more recent text, the SC reaffirms "the primary responsibility of States to ensure [refugee] protection, in particular by maintaining the security and civilian character of refugee and internally displaced person camps": UNSC 1999, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (S/RES/1265)*, preambular clause 10.

[104] G. Loescher, *Beyond Charity: International Cooperation and the Global Refugee Crisis,* New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p.88.

[105] *Ibid.*, p.59.

[106] F. Grare, *Le Pakistan*, *op.cit.,* pp.103-4.

[107] O. Roy, *L'Afghanistan*, *op.cit.*, 275; when he was in Jordan as a military advisor during the Black September uprising of the Palestinian refugees, he had witnessed what social and ethnic force for the mobilization of political opposition a migrant population could develop: F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.,* p.6; F. Grare, *Le Pakistan*, *op.cit.,* p.97 (footnote 1); F. Grare, *Geopolitics of Afghan Refugees*, *op.cit.,* p.65.

[108] B. R. Rubin, 15 August 2006. *Interview*. Frontline.

[109] F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.,* p.61.

[110] F. Grare, *Geopolitics of Afghan Refugees*, *op.cit.,* p.73.

[111] *Ibid.*

Beyond Pakistani national and regional politics, geopolitical interests of the US played in important role in shaping and maintaining the support of the Afghan resistance.[112] Two short-term and one long-term objective of the US in this conflict can be identified: to strengthen Pakistan as an ally replacing Iran, which had been "lost" as an ally with the Islamic Revolution in 1979; to make the USSR pay a high price for its invasion of Afghanistan; and, in the long term, strengthening the overall military standing of the US in the region.[113] Even before the Soviet invasion, there was probably some assistance of Afghan *mujāhideen* from the US. This support of the radical Islamist elements in the Afghan resistance by the US continued to increase from US$30 million in 1980 to about US$630 in 1987, although, until 1985, the US took all provisions necessary to keep their involvement deniable.[114]

The UNHCR presence was used by Pakistan as a shield against accusations of its involvement in the activities of the resistance. When, in April 1979, the *International Herald Tribune* reports that the Afghan military resistance was led from ARVs in the Waziristan district of the NWFP,[115] this is refuted in a press release in June 1979, in which the GOP states that the UNHCR assessment mission to Pakistan did not find any evidence for military activities in the ARVs.[116] There is evidence neither of the cited UNHCR report nor of any other follow-up on these allegations in the treated series.

But whatever may have been the actual result of any UNHCR inquiry, the incidence shows the usefulness of the UNHCR presence to Pakistan, as an alibi of objective verification and safeguard of humanitarian appearances, particularly in the light of the further development of Pakistani aid to the *mujāhideen*. A UNHCR annual "report on protection activities" (April 1983) from the Branch Office in Islamabad reports that "since late 1982, senior government officials have publicly referred to the presence of UNHCR as cogent evidence that the Afghans in Pakistan are *bona fide* asylum seekers and not freedom fighters."[117] The report goes on to explain that,

> [h]owever, as has been reported from time to time, even though UNHCR confines its humanitarian programme to persons of its concern, there is ample evidence that the government as the operational partner is permitting, by acts of commission or omission, humanitarian assistance to flow into the hands of freedom fighters participating in the 'Holy Jehad'.[118]

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[112] For more archival material concerning the tension between humanitarian mandate and state interest, cf. R. Schöch, UNHCR and the Afghan Refugees in the Early 1980s: Between Humanitarian Action and Cold War Politics, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No.1, 2008, forthcoming.

[113] J. C. Hurewitz, "The Middle East: A Year of Turmoil", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 3, 1980, p.552.

[114] B. R. Rubin *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, *op.cit,* p.180; F. Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, *op.cit.,* p.59.

[115] UNHCR, 17 April 1979, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 70c.

[116] UNHCR, 4 June 1979, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 100-PAK.AFG, folio 84.

[117] UNHCR, 14 April 1983, UNHCR Fonds 11 Series 2, 110-PAK, folio 37, p.6.

[118] *Ibid*.

This note clearly shows what impact the lack of direct control over the ARVs could have. Even though UNHCR strove to pursue its mandate according to its principles, it had not control over the Pakistani side of the refugee administration. While Islamabad used UNHCR as an alibi for the humanitarian nature of the support it gave to the Afghans, who condoned the support of the *mujāhideen* with humanitarian assistance.

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that the registration practice in Pakistan violated some of UNHCR's basic principles. Looking for explanations for the fact that UNHCR seemed to tolerate these violations, this article traced some of the geopolitical and internal political motivations behind the policies and actions of the state actors involved in both the Afghanistan conflict and the relief operation.

It has become evident that the refugee population was instrumentalized for the pursuit of political agendas, which included the US-American objectives of strengthening their own foothold in the region while weakening the USSR, as well as the GOP's objectives of using the Afghan resistance and population to polish its own standing in the international community and, at the same time, to improve the odds of having a more benevolent government of Afghanistan in the future. Most notably, making membership in one of the resistance parties a precondition for refugee assistance, the GOP rallied the refugees around the parties which were both most conducive for the GOP's own political objectives and most effective in its armed resistance against the Afghan and Soviet forces.

Faced with the politicization and militarization of the ARVs, UNHCR found itself in the classic humanitarian dilemma, which was at the heart of most of the refugee crises in the 1980s and 1990s: It had the choice either to continue its assistance programme in favour of those who unquestionably needed its aid for their survival and were entitled to UNHCR's protection and assistance under the international refugee regime, while accepting that some of the aid might be diverted to those who did not fall under the mandate; or else, it would have to withdraw from the operation in Pakistan – in order to avoid any abuse of the UNHCR's assistance and credibility as guardian of the international refugee regime, while accepting that many who desperately needed the aid would suffer from this approach.

The US, as the most important donor of UNHCR, was well positioned to pressurize UNHCR into maintaining its operation despite the adverse circumstances. The GOP, for its part, used its imposed position as intermediary between the international assistance on the one hand and the refugees on the other to create a system of relief delivery that allowed them to control the refugees and the Afghan political parties. The fact that the Pakistani authorities had several thousand staff members of the Refugee Commission, whereas UNHCR had very limited staff capacities, played into the hands of the GOP and its design for the refugee registration practice and camp control in general.

Apart from an occasional mention in the communications between UNHCR's Branch Offices and Headquarters, the difficulties that the GOP's handling of the Afghan refugee crisis created for UNHCR was hardly discussed in the available documents. This is surprising, as the Pakistani practice must have produced day-to-day problems for the UNHCR offices when dealing with the Afghan refugees. If these are not discussed in the files, it indicates that they were either accepted because the situation was difficult to change, or the discussion took place through other channels of communication. In conclusion, it can be said that UNHCR certainly did not condone the practices contravening the international refugee regime. Caught between the pressure from donors and the political

and military strategies of President Zia for the support of the *mujāhideen*, however, UNHCR had little choice but to keep delivering aid to the Afghan refugees despite the implications for its neutrality and impartiality.