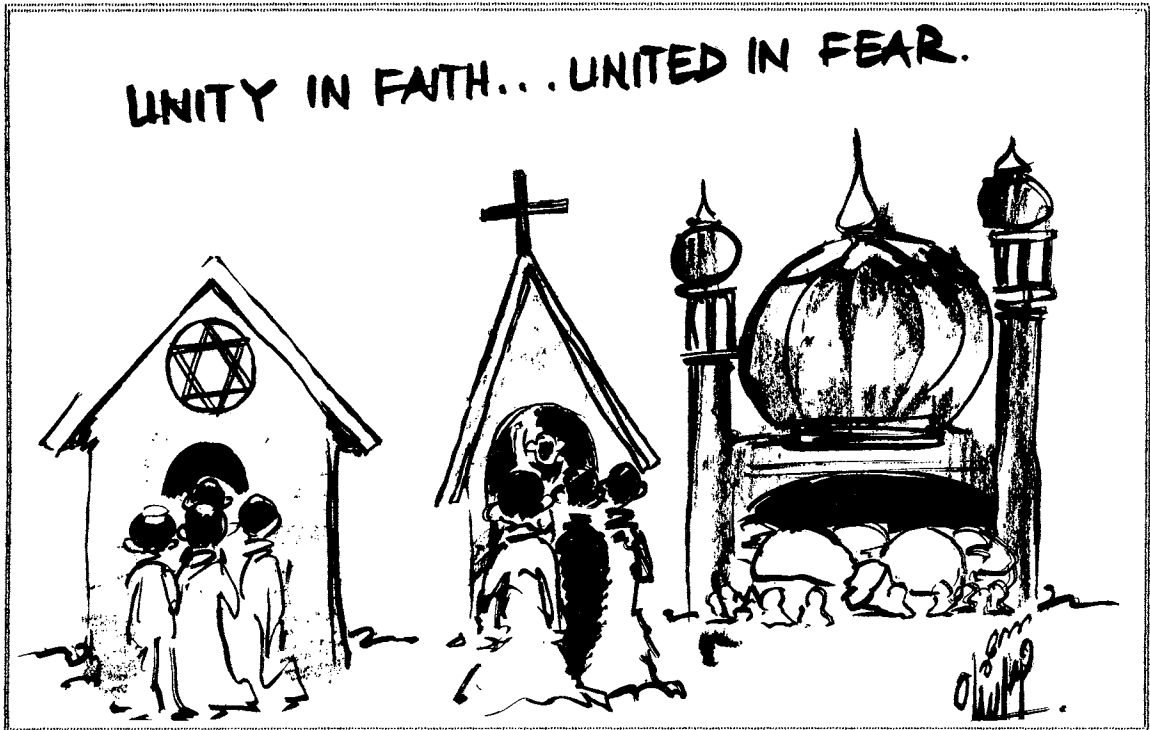


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Cartoon from The Muslim newspaper in Pakistan on the day of the U.N.-imposed deadline for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait.

WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY  
Refugee Assistance and Anti-Americanism

by Carol Rose

An emergency alert on my U.S. government-issued walkie-talkie told me it was going to be another one of those days. A crowd was amassing on the main road in Peshawar, chanting anti-American slogans, burning the U.S. flag and effigies of President George Bush, and carrying posters of their new folk hero: Saddam Hussein.

I cringed at the thought of spending an entire day indoors. After all, I already had moved from my home to a "safe house," equipped with a two-way radio, round-the-clock armed guards, and

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Cartoon from The Frontier Post newspaper showing President Bush and allied soldiers quoting famous Pakistani Poet, Alama Iqbal, urging Muslims to look after Holy sites in Saudi Arabia.

bars on the windows. But imprisonment, self-imposed or otherwise, has little appeal. I decided to keep my appointment across town.

My driver, Amin, suggested we take the canal road, a dirt path that circumvents the main streets by winding through a refugee tent village and Afghan marketplace. We bounced along the rutted road, careening back and forth to avoid barefoot toddlers and untethered water buffalo. I congratulated myself for venturing out in the hostile climate of Peshawar. Amin chatted gaily about the neighborhood, laughing at the school children dangling

from the fenders, doors and windows of a brightly-painted refugee school bus just in front of us.

Suddenly, our car lurched -- WHAM -- I heard the crunching sound of metal-against-metal. I looked up to see another car backing away from our front end, his bumper completely torn off. Amin threw an anguished glance my way before he jumped out. One look said it all: "Please don't get out of the car!"

He didn't have to tell me. A crowd of Afghan men emerged from nowhere and gathered around the two cars to assess the damage. I realized that this was a jirga, or assembly of elders, the traditional forum for dispensing justice and making community decisions in Afghanistan. I pulled my head scarf low over my forehead and up over my nose, cursing my blue eyes. My mind swam as I imagined possible judgements if the jirga realized I was an American. ("The car and its infidel passenger shall be rolled into the canal!") Amin stood quietly at the center of the jirga saying little and listening respectfully to the debate.

After about five minutes, the assembly broke up. Their verdict: the other driver would pay half of the cost of damages to our rental car (about \$10) and shoulder the full cost of repairs to his own vehicle. The owner of the other car paid up on the spot. There was no argument, no police, no small claims court, no lawyers and no insurance agents. Marvelling at the ease with which the incident was settled, I wondered if the Afghans might be better off left to settle their own affairs, without U.S. or other outside intervention.

This notion -- that outsiders hurt more than they help -- recurs time and again as I attempt to understand the plight of the Afghan refugees in the midst of fierce anti-American sentiment among both Afghans and Pakistanis in Peshawar.

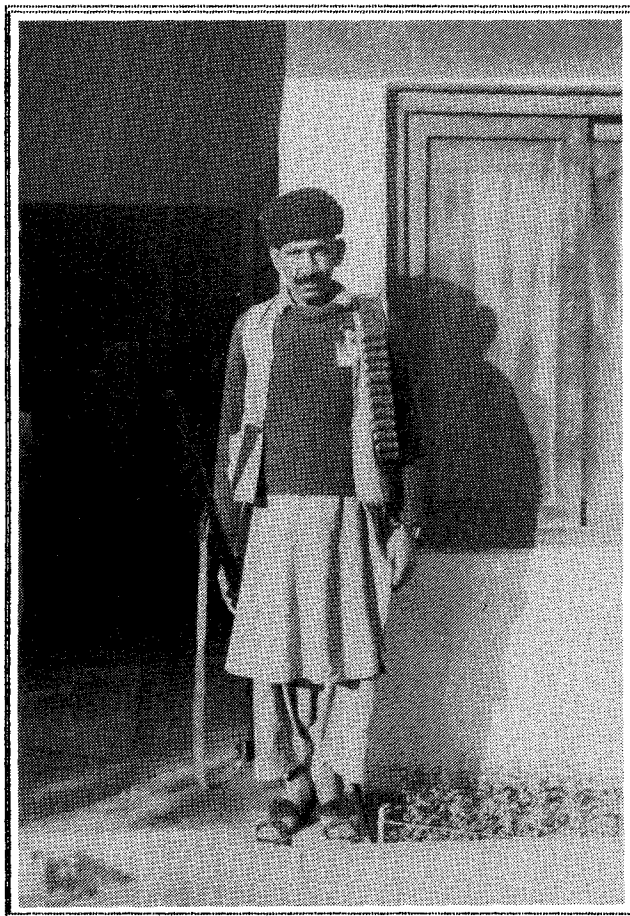
On the same day as my first-hand experience with an Afghan firga, the U.S. Embassy announced that all non-essential U.S. government employees were being ordered out of Pakistan immediately. Everyone else was being strongly advised to get out as soon as possible. My plan to study Afghan refugees was thwarted. Ironically, it was I who soon would be the refugee.

### WHY DO THEY HATE AMERICA?

Pakistan isn't a place for Americans who care about being popular. Although the Pakistani government sent some 10,000 troops to support U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia, public sentiment clearly backed Iraq.

In the days leading up to the January 15 U.N.-imposed deadline for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, and in the days after the war began, Pakistan was racked by daily demonstrations demanding the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Islamic lands. Groups vowed to attack American targets in Pakistan, and U.S. Embassy officials warned of possible kidnappings and looting of Western homes. Local newspapers reported that thousands of Pakistani had volunteered to fight on the side of Iraq. The Tehrik Khilaf-i-Kuffar Tanzeem, or "Anti-heathen Organization," called for a nation-wide Jihad (Holy War) against the United States and Americans living in Pakistan.

Tensions were particularly high in Peshawar, where Pakistanis and Afghans joined forces in



My faithful guard, Shamsool, prepared to defend against any attack with his home-made shotgun.

a rare display of unity against a common enemy: Uncle Sam. Demonstrators repeatedly marched on the U.S. consulate in Peshawar, reviving memories of the burning of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad in 1979 in support of the Ayatollah Khomeini and the attack on an American government information center in 1989 in response to Salmon's Rushdie's Satanic Verses.

Leaders of the Afghan mujahideen, financed for more than a decade by the United States and Saudi Arabia, also issued statements in support of Iraq and calling for an end to the U.S. military presence in Moslem parts of the world. Gulbadin Hekmatyar, chief of the fanatical Hezb-i-Islami Afghan political party, issued a "peace plan" for the Gulf in which he called on Muslims to "divert their resources and military might toward Israel and liberate the whole Arab territories from the control of the Jewish state."<sup>1</sup>



"A burning Bush" effigy in flames at an anti-American rally in Peshawar. (The Frontier Post, Jan. 11, 1991.)

Such displays of anti-Americanism run counter to the notion that U.S. foreign aid buys good will. After all, the United States has spent some \$3 billion in the last decade financing the Afghan mujahideen war against the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul. Washington gives another \$600 million annually to Pakistan in economic and military assistance. Where is the return on our investment?

#### U.S. AID AND AFGHAN REFUGEES: CAN'T BUY ME LOVE

Anthony Arnold, a long-time Afghan hand in the State Department, once observed that it is impossible to buy loyalty from an Afghan. "You can only rent it," he quipped.

As aid shrinks, so does goodwill. Nowadays, many Afghans in Peshawar complain that Washington has lost its commitment to the Afghan struggle. By last summer, Washington had cut its aid to the mujahideen to around \$300 million annually. In contrast, Moscow continued to pour that amount of money into Kabul each month. A common fear expressed by the Afghan refugees is that Washington will negotiate

<sup>1</sup>. The Frontier Post, Tuesday, January 15, 1991, Vol VI., No. 172, p. 1.

a deal with the Soviet Union for a mutual cut-off of aid to both sides in the war, without first removing the communist president in Kabul, Najibullah.

More disturbing to me than the reduction of U.S. aid, however, is the manner in which refugee assistance has been administered for the last decade. Said one Afghan moderate: "You Americans think money can buy everything, and you have so much of it that you forget about nurturing the human element in relations."

U.S. assistance to Afghan refugees was intended primarily for political, rather than humanitarian, purposes. Specifically, it was supposed to foil Soviet aims to control Afghanistan. Because American aid was covert, Washington relied on the military government of Pakistan to disperse the money. As a result, U.S. aid to the Afghans often was diverted from the human needs of the refugees and instead was used to finance the aspirations of the Pakistani government.

At the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan was led by Zia ul-Haq, a general in the Pakistan army and devout Muslim. Since Pakistan had never signed the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees, it was not bound to international standards on the treatment of refugees. Nonetheless, Zia enthusiastically embraced the 3 million Afghan refugees who fled to Pakistan. His aim: to leverage massive U.S. economic and military assistance for Pakistan and secure a future government in Kabul friendly to Pakistan, or at least one that was too weak to pose a threat.

Soon after the Soviet invasion, Zia created the State and Frontier Regions Ministry (SAFRON), a pseudo-ministry directly under the president that defined and implemented all refugee policy in Pakistan, and to which all international aid agencies were required to answer.<sup>2</sup> According to many Western aid officials, the Pakistani intelligence agency, or ISI, has its fingerprints on virtually all aid to refugees in Pakistan.

A number of distortions arose from Pakistan's grip on refugee assistance. The most notable was the requirement that refugees register with one of the seven Peshawar-based Afghan political parties before receiving a ration card. This led to a system of political patronage in which the mujahideen parties maintained power by controlling aid rather than by winning ideological followers. There also were reports that newly-arrived Afghan refugees were strong-armed by Pakistani officials

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<sup>2</sup> Helga Baitenmann, "NGOs and the Afghan War: The Politicisation of Humanitarian Aid," in Third World Quarterly, vol. 12, no. 1, January 1990, pp. 62 - 85.

to sign up for the Gulbadin's Hezb-i-Islami party, often in the presence of Hezb members.<sup>3</sup>

The seven Peshawar-based resistance parties are now the basis of the U.S.-backed Afghan Interim Government. Yet polls suggest these parties have little popular support among the refugees.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, many of these parties -- notably Hezb-i-Islami -- are distinctly anti-American despite the U.S. foreign assistance they reportedly receive through Pakistan.

Corruption also has plagued assistance to Afghan refugees, with much of the money earmarked for refugees going instead to the resistance parties and Pakistani officials.<sup>5</sup> Women and children, who make up some 85 percent of the refugee population, have been particularly hard-hit by the diversion of funds intended for them, since they have almost no political voice in the refugee community.

Despite evidence of aid abuses, Washington often looked the other way out of concern that "Pakistan might abandon its stalwart opposition to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in favor of a policy of accommodation with the USSR."<sup>6</sup>

Since the Red Army withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988, expectations have arisen that the refugees will go home to rebuild their war-torn country. Western assistance to Afghanistan for the last two years thus has been redirected to cross-border development projects. Aid organizations based in Pakistan now attempt to operate small and large-scale rebuilding projects across the border into Afghanistan.

Here, too, problems arise. Reports suggest that mujahideen political leaders have threatened to kill any refugee who attempts to return. Moreover, few refugees are willing to turn in their ration cards, as required for United Nations repatriation assistance, as long as fighting continues within Afghanistan.

In addition, monitoring of project activities across the border and of goods flowing into Afghanistan is virtually impossible. Diversion and resale of free or subsidized aid

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Independent, London, 30 July 1987, quoted in Baitenmann.

<sup>5</sup> Baitenmann, op.cit.

<sup>6</sup> Department of State airgram, Islamabad, 8 September 1981, no. A-67, quoted in Baitenmann, op.cit.



Cartoon in the Pakistani daily, The Frontier Post, two days before the United States attacked Iraq.

commodities has spawned a highly profitable black-market for both Pakistanis and Afghans. Rumors abound that U.S. fertilizer and pesticide sent for refugee farmers returning to Afghanistan is instead being used to grow poppies to make heroin for export. Local Afghan commanders have absolute authority in regions where the Kabul government is not in control. These commanders dictate the terms of development, taxing all goods transported on roads in their jurisdiction and seeking to control any development funds in their area. Foreign assistance organizations are required to seek approval from these commanders and work closely with them or risk being shut out.

Of course, not all foreign assistance to the Afghans has been misused. Widespread famine and disease among the refugees has been prevented because of aid programs in the camps, parts of Afghanistan are being rebuilt, and crop destruction from a locust plague that threatened northern Afghanistan last year was substantially reduced by United Nations efforts.

Nonetheless, the apparent politicization of Western assistance to Afghan refugees has created strong vested interests among the Peshawar-based mujahideen parties for maintaining the refugees in the closed camps. Some of these leaders have no traditional base in Afghanistan, and thus have little to gain from repatriation of the refugees.

Already, some foreign assistance -- notably money from Japan -- has been frozen until the refugees begin to return home. It remains to be seen whether the reduction of aid channeled through Peshawar will encourage refugees to return or will simply fuel the anti-foreign sentiment.

#### **U.S. AID AND PAKISTAN: BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO**

American aid to Afghan refugees has been dependent on the U.S. relationship with Pakistan. It is not surprising, therefore, that waning U.S. interest in the plight of the Afghans has coincided with a suspension of U.S. aid to Pakistan itself. Nor is it startling that the aid cut-off has fueled anti-American feeling throughout Pakistan.

Ostensibly, Washington has suspended aid to protest Pakistan's nuclear development program. Islamabad vows that it will sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty only if India will do the same. America's failure to acknowledge Pakistan's fear of the Indian nuclear bomb has ignited anger against the United States, sparking calls for economic self-reliance. The newly-elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has vowed to fight American imperialism by creating an economy independent of U.S. aid. No one I've spoken with seems to believe that is possible.

The economic implications of an American aid suspension have been intensified by events in the Persian Gulf. According to the Pakistani daily, The Frontier Post, \$300 million in annual remittances from Kuwait and Iraq have stopped because of the expulsion of Pakistani workers from those countries. Another \$50 million was spent bringing the workers home. The Pakistani government also raised the price of petrol more than 40 percent following the Iraqi invasion, putting additional inflationary pressure on the economy.



The surge of anti-Western sentiment in Pakistan has religious and historical roots as well. Pakistan was created as an Islamic nation by a group of men who argued that India's Moslem minority would be persecuted by its Hindu majority. The original Pakistan elite, led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, reportedly were not particularly devout. But their Islamic identity was the justification for the creation of a separate country.

In recent years, Pakistani politicians have used Islam as a sort of litmus test of patriotism. It strikes me as somewhat disingenuous, akin to George Bush's political strategy of focusing on flag-burning and Willie Horton in the last U.S. presidential race. For example, all Pakistani political parties argue vehemently for the imposition of Islamic Shariat law, but no government ever manages to implement it. And while alcohol is illegal in this Moslem nation, it is generally acknowledged that the Pakistani elite imbibes behind closed doors. (The chief minister of Sindh, however, recently got into hot water for admitting publicly that he drank for "medicinal purposes." After widespread calls for his dismissal, he retracted the statement.)

Whether or not the politicians believe their own Islamic rhetoric, the Pakistan masses seem to have embraced it. The result is an apparent rift between the moderately Islamic government and the increasing socially conservative public.

This Islamic-derived conservatism is tinder for anti-Western feelings. It also is likely to be reflected in the political orientation of future Pakistani governments. Anti-U.S.



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Foreign money-changers in the Old City of Peshawar will be among the first to feel the economic pinch as Westerners flee Pakistan.

demonstrations were punctuated by verbal attacks on the Pakistani government for its support of the U.S. military venture in Iraq. Soon after the war began, Prime Minister Sharif bowed to domestic pressures by loudly condemning Israel and embarking on a tour of Islamic nations in an attempt to sell his four-point peace plan.

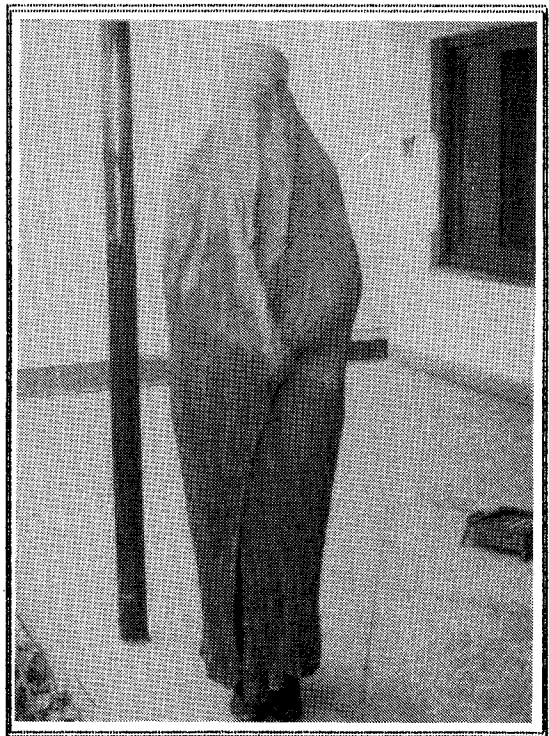
#### **THE FUTURE: TWO STEPS BACK?**

Absent the economic benefits of American aid, it is likely that Pakistan and the Afghan mujahideen will turn increasingly anti-American in the months to come. Much depends on the political fall-out from the Gulf War, regardless of the military outcome. The risk now is that America will win its battle against Iraq but lose the hearts and minds of the people whose loyalty it has rented for so many years.

Moreover, the Gulf war and instability within the Soviet Union has stalled superpower negotiations on Afghanistan. This delay, combined with the likelihood of drastic reductions in future aid to the region, may well convince the Afghans to return to traditional methods of conflict resolution.

Among the most hopeful plans for the future is a loya jirga, or nationwide assembly, tentatively scheduled for March. Local groups throughout Afghanistan currently are being asked to select their representatives for the assembly. No one is certain who will make up the loya jirga, or where or when it will take place. But there is talk of including members from the Afghan political parties in Pakistan and Iran, representatives of the refugee communities, field commanders from inside Afghanistan, mullahs and possibly even representatives from the regime in Kabul.

Many outsiders are skeptical that a jirga comprised of hundreds of people representing conflicting interests can accomplish anything. But if my singular experience with a much smaller jirga holds any lesson, it is perhaps that peace will come to Afghanistan and the refugees when foreigners least expect it.



**The author under wraps in a burqa.**