

# Reflections on Events in Afghanistan: US Brings Culture Wars to Afghanistan

By [M. K. Bhadrakumar](#)

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*The time has come to pick up threads from my blog of January 27 titled [The West co-opts the Taliban](#). Indeed, the wheel has come full circle since the three-day conclave in Oslo on January 23-25 between a core group of Western diplomats with Taliban officials failed to work out a reasonable modus vivendi. The pendulum has since swung to the other extreme.*

Afghanistan has once again become the cockpit of big power rivalries due to developments intrinsic to Afghan situation, a regime change in Pakistan and the shifts in regional politics in Central Asia due to the fallouts from the collective West's proxy war with Russia in Europe.

To recapitulate, Russia and China brilliantly undercut the US' attempt in Oslo to co-opt the Taliban government as its partner. The terms of partnership were not acceptable to the Taliban, especially the leeway that the US and British intelligence sought to stage covert operations from Afghan soil.

Russia and China created space for Taliban to negotiate with the US by simply offering them the prospect of a beneficial relationship. The US's core objective was to use Afghanistan as a staging post for its containment strategies against Russia, China and Iran.

Since then, the US estimates that with Russia bogged down in Ukraine and China remaining extra-cautious in consorting with Moscow, a window of opportunity is available for it to proactively work toward promoting regime changes in Central Asia and wrest the region from the Russian orbit.

Attempts were made in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan but the regimes in those countries were vigilant. The failed attempts once again drew attention to the importance of Afghanistan as a high ground in the geopolitics of the Central Asian region. Hence the need to regain control over Kabul.

This is a truly collective effort by the Western intelligence, with the US, UK, France and

Germany in the lead role. Unsurprisingly, the West's focus has shifted to the northern regions of Afghanistan bordering the ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia.

With a pro-Western regime in power in Pakistan, the US gets a free hand to work with the non-Taliban groups. The Western powers assess that the so-called National Resistance Front (NRF) led by the Panjshiri leader Ahmed Massoud provides a congenial platform for advancing their regional agenda.

Apart from the Massoud clan's decades-old links with the French intelligence, Ahmed Massoud himself was trained in Sandhurst. The Panjshiris are irreconcilably opposed to Pashtun rule and also have ethnic affinities with Tajikistan.

Enter Emmanuel Macron. France has a score to settle with the Kremlin ever since Russia's [Wagner Group summarily replaced the French Legion](#) as the provider of security to the Francophone countries in the Sahel region, which were historically France's playpen. [Macron intends to retaliate](#) in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

In this shadow play, [Macron sees as quasi-ally](#) the president of Tajikistan Imomali Rahmon. Now, Rahmon's inscrutable mind is never easy to fathom and is rather complicated in this case, as Tajik-Russian equations are also involved, but he does seem to prioritise that there is a lot of money that the West is prepared to spend to foster the NRF and Massoud, and this western venture is for sure going to be for the long haul.

Rahmon's trump card is that Tajikistan is the gateway to Panjshir and it can provide a transit corridor for the flow of Western money, men and materials to boost the NRF's capability to wage an armed struggle and emerge quickly as a credible political entity regionally.

Dushanbe hosted the so-called Herat Security Dialogue earlier this week to facilitate a meet-up between the NRF (Massoud) and sundry other disgruntled Afghan politicians hostile toward Taliban rule and domiciled in the West, with the US and European intelligence officials mentoring the event.

Clearly, the venture aims to broad-base the NRF by bringing on board all anti-Taliban elements. Interestingly, a sideshow at Dushanbe was that the Afghans networked with hand-picked invitees from regional states as well, including Russia and Iran, largely self-styled "liberals" who are willing to subserve the West's agenda.

In a nutshell, the venture aims to build up another Afghan resistance movement to oust the Taliban from power. The ground is being prepared for a new civil war where the West hopes to emerge victorious eventually but without having to put "boots on the ground."

However, this incoming civil war is going to be very unlike all previous ones in Afghan history. For, this is being projected as a culture war — a struggle for dominance between groups within the Afghan society arising from their different beliefs or practices — although quintessentially it could be regraded as yet another grab for political power with foreign help.

It bears similarity with the culture wars playing out in America during the past two decades and more between the liberal secular society and a conservative opposition that rooted its worldview in divine scripture. Today, in America it is playing out in vicious fights over abortion, gay rights, religion in public schools and the like.

The culture war in Afghanistan too will inevitably expand from issues of religion and family culture to take over politics almost totally, creating a dangerous sense of winner-take-all conflict over the future of the country, as is happening in America.

The paradox here is that the proposed insurrection by Panjshiris is taking place in the name of Democracy, whereas, democracy at its core is an agreement that we will not kill each other over our differences, but instead we'll talk through those differences howsoever long it may take. Massoud's NRF, on the contrary, is wedded to violence to overthrow the Taliban government which has been in power for only a little over a year.

During this past year, Taliban coped with an extraordinary situation and the glass is half-full, objectively speaking. Yes, there are things happening out there that [do not conform to the western norms](#) of liberal democracy. Nonetheless, the [rule of law exists](#) — except that Islamic law is the guiding principle. Indeed, the belief that religious expression can contribute to democracy has a long history even in western countries, as does the belief that any religion is a good thing.

Fundamentally, there is a dangerous misconception here since politics at its core is nothing but an artifact of culture. And culture underwrites politics in all countries, including America or France. To be sure, the Taliban will see the incoming civil war promoted by the West as an existential threat to their way of life, to the things they hold sacred. That is to say, the Taliban's resistance to the NRF will be rooted in fear of extinction. They will fight to death for a way of life.

Why is the West doing this to Afghanistan after having destroyed that country's social fabric through the past two decades perpetrating such horrific war crimes? At the very least, first return that country's money in western banks and allow the Afghan nation a decent respite to lick its war wounds, before inciting another civil war. At the present juncture, without doubt, it is the [humanitarian crisis](#) that ought to be the number one priority for the international community.

Abdul Latif Pedram, a rare progressive-minded Afghan politician known for his integrity, wrote in a tweet, "I was invited to the security meeting of Herat (at Dushanbe), but I did not participate in the meeting due to the presence of corrupt people."

Indeed, it is an insult to the Afghan people that the westerners continue to treat them like mute cattle. Pedram added that the invitees to the Dushanbe meeting were all associated with the corrupt regime that the Taliban replaced, and are bankrupt in ideas to improve the tragic situation in his country.

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