

THE INCONCLUSIVE REPATRIATION OF AFGHAN REFUGEES FROM PAKISTAN: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Muhammad Khan* & Hassan Farooq**

Abstract

Refugees and internally displaced persons are inescapable remnants of wars, political turbulence and natural disasters. Historically, people confronting religious and racial persecutions used to leave for non-violent regions, but presently political subjugation is the major cause of enforced migration. The settlement of around eighty million displaced persons worldwide is a paramount global challenge. The refugees, displaced persons and migrants occasionally gain worldwide significance for serving the political interests of various great powers; otherwise, along with their host nations they bear least worth for the world powers. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 out-broke more than four million refugees into Pakistan. The West, especially the United States (US) as part of their anti-Communist Cold War agenda, lavishly assisted the Afghan Mujahidin, as they had launched guerilla warfare against the Soviet troops. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1992 initiated a large scale repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan after the Russian withdrawal from Kabul. Another massive repatriation program was also initiated in 2002 after the collapse of the Taliban regime by the US led International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF). However, the terrible economic and security situations in Afghanistan spoiled the fruits of repatriations. On the other hand, Pakistan seeks the repatriation of millions of Afghans from its soil at the earliest, while the UNHCR, the refugees and Afghanistan have been apparently adopting the time-gaining strategy. An in-depth study of this highly complex issue reveals that Islamabad has yet to table a comprehensive repatriation plan, Kabul is incapable and inadvertent

* Professor, Dept. of Politics & IR, IIU, Islamabad. Email: drmkndu1964@gmail.com.

**Assistant Professor, School of IR, Minhaj University Lahore Email: hassanfarooq014@gmail.com

to the issue and the global community has least interest in the Afghan refugees. Pakistan and the refugees have been suffering since decades.

Keywords: Cold War, ISAF, Durand-Line, refugees, repatriation, UNHCR

Introduction

The presence of millions of Afghan refugees for several decades has multiplied the social, political, economic and security challenges of Pakistan. The inadvertent behaviour of international community, the incapability of Kabul and Islamabad's failure to work out a comprehensive and consistent policy for the repatriation of Afghans from its soil; has horrendously complicated the issue. Initially the Afghan refugees were welcomed and generously supported by various stakeholders, for their worth in the anti-communist campaign.¹ Nevertheless, ever since the culmination of Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, these refugees have lost their worth both for the West and the international community. Eventually, the Afghan refugees and their host, Pakistan, have been helplessly confronting enormous challenges. Islamabad has been earnestly demanding the repatriation of Afghan refugees from its soil at the earliest; particularly, due to its intricate security and wavering economy.

The issues like; the loss of interest from the international community, the wretched economic and security situation in Afghanistan, the incapable and inadvertent Kabul regimes towards the repatriation and resettlement of millions of distressed Afghans in exile; have further complicated the challenges for the refugees and their host, Pakistan. Although, Islamabad has never ratified the international conventions pertaining to the issues of refugees, still it has held the title of being the world's largest refugees hosting country in the world for decades and currently it clutches the position of the second largest host to the refugees, worldwide.² In addition, Pakistan is also accredited as the worst sufferer of the problem in the world.³ Though, the international community acknowledges this fact, yet it shows least interests to assist Pakistan in handling the paramount challenge of repatriation or resettlement of the millions of refugees in their native country.

¹ Rudiger Schoch. "Afghan refugees in Pakistan during the 1980s: cold war politics and registration practice. Research Paper No. 157. (UNHCR, 2008)."

² Yousaf Ali, Muhammad Sabir, and Noor Muhammad. "Refugees and host country nexus: A case study of Pakistan." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 20, no. 1 (2019): 137-153.

³ Ghosh, Sucharita, and Ali Enami. "Do refugee-immigrants affect international trade? Evidence from the world's largest refugee case." *Journal of Policy Modeling* 37, no. 2 (2015): 291-307.

The West, particularly the US, benignly supported Islamabad and the Afghan *Mujahidin* (the plural of *Mujahid* – an Arabic term used for *strugglers or strivers for justice, right conduct and Godly rule*) in their sacred fight against the Soviets.⁴ However, soon after the Russian withdrawal from Kabul and its collapse, the Afghan refugees and their host Pakistan were helplessly abandoned to settle this gargantuan issue at their own way. It was unmanageable for Islamabad to carry away the burden of decade-long proxy war amid the two super powers with its own muscles. Generally, it is held that the most appropriate and perhaps the durable solution strategy towards the refugees' issue is voluntary repatriation to their country of origin. However, the million dollar question is, to what extent the phenomenon of repatriation on voluntary basis is auspicious for all the major stakeholders, particularly in case of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Soon after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Kabul, the repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan started;⁵ but, owing to the extremely volatile security situation in Afghanistan and the conflict of interests between Kabul and Islamabad, the repatriation campaign persisted as veering. In early 1990s and 2000s, several millions Afghan refugees repatriated to their native country; however, the perpetual political unrest and dearth of socioeconomic necessities proved as major obstacles in the reintegration and resettlement of returnees in Afghanistan. Consequently the Afghans have been repeatedly choosing the option to search their habitation on the Eastern side of the Durand Line and returned to Pakistan as recyclers.⁶ On the other hand, Islamabad has been consistently asking for the permanent return of refugees, but its aspirations have been short of the desires due to various 'pull' and 'push' factors on both sides of the Durand-Line.⁷ The decades- long succession of Afghans between returnees and recyclers has made the refugees and their host Pakistan to bear the endless encumbrances.

This study aims to analyse the inconclusive repatriation of Afghans from Pakistan in the past three decades along with the ever existed pull and push factors on both sides of the Durand-Line (the porous Pak-Afghan Border that is more than 2600 km stretched). The factors that either encouraged or enforced the Afghan people to repeatedly opt, the choices of either leaving their native country or leaving for their country. This refugee

⁴ Schoch, Rudiger. "Afghan refugees in Pakistan during the 1980s: cold war politics and registration practice. UNHCR; research paper No. 157. 2008 [cited 2009 Jul 31]."

⁵ Ghufuran, Nasreen. "Afghan refugees in Pakistan current situation and future scenario." *Policy perspectives* (2006): 83-104.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ames, Todd Trowbridge. "Factors affecting the repatriation of the Afghan refugees." (1992).

– recycler Ping-Pong by the Afghans during the past four decades has been the reflection of restlessness in Afghanistan and resentment of Pakistan. Theoretical outline of the study is related to the 1951 UN Convention⁸, the 1967 Protocol⁹ and the UNHCR's charter of Refugees. The data has been collected from both the primary and secondary sources by adopting the qualitative and quantitative strategies simultaneously.

Afghan Conflict triggered the Influx of Millions of Refugees' in Pakistan

The last quarter of the 20th century, yet again witnessed Afghanistan as turning out to be the 'battlefield' of the Cold War between the then two superpowers of the bipolar world system, the United States of America (USA) and the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). On the eve of the Christmas in 1979, in its tenacity for ascertaining a more proactive role in Afghanistan, Russia decided to take the desperate step of moving its armed forces into the traditional graveyards of the super powers – Afghanistan.¹⁰ However, the Moscow's aspiration of instituting its full control over the entire land-mass of Afghanistan proved only a suicidal move for the world's largest country that disintegrated within just around a decade.

The deadly war between the Soviet troops and their puppet Kabul regime, on the one hand and the armed Afghan guerrillas who were equipped with the US supplied state of the art weapons, on the other hand, eventually proved as a climax to the culmination of the cold war between the two super powers. The *Afghan Mujahidin*, politically and economically backed by the US, Pakistan, Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), not only ousted the Soviet troops from their soil but also destabilized the Soviet Union so desperately that the world's largest country failed to maintain its territorial integrity. On the other hand, the conflict not only devastated an already underprivileged Afghanistan, but also depopulated the country as a result of mass evacuation to the neighboring countries, mainly

⁸ Weis, Paul, and Cambridge University. Research Centre for International Law. *The refugee convention, 1951*. Vol. 7. Cambridge University Press, 1995.

⁹ Blay, Samuel KN, and B. Martin Tsamenyi. "Reservations and Declarations under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 2, no. 4 (1990): 527-561.

¹⁰ Kühn, Florian P. "Afghanistan and the 'Graveyard of Empires': Blumenberg, under-complex Analogy and Basic Myths in international Politics." In *Myth and narrative in international politics*. pp. 147-172. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016.

Pakistan and Iran. Ultimately more than three and half million Afghan refugees escaped into Pakistan and around two million fled to Iran.¹¹

On the resumption of presidential office in 1985, certainly the most domineering obstacle for Mikhail Gorbachev, the then Russian President, was the stinging affairs of Soviet forces in Afghanistan.¹² Therefore, in 1988, the domestic, regional and global pressures enforced Moscow to take a tougher decision of withdrawing the Russian troops from Kabul to protect them from further devastations.¹³ However, the Russian withdrawal did not end the unrest in Afghanistan and another succession of lethal clashes continued in the country between the vain Communist regime of Kabul and the opposition until the collapse of Afghan President Najibullah in April 1992.¹⁴ Still peace and stability could not triumph in the country due to another wave of clashes amid the sloppily allied *Mujahidin* groups for maximizing their control over various territories and institutions as bounty of war against the Soviets. In spite of the establishment of a coalition interim government in Kabul, central political authority was pathetic and almost all the key areas of Afghanistan leaped into further chaos and political as well as economic destabilization.¹⁵

In late 1994, the *Taliban* (A religious extremist force in Afghanistan emerged under Mullah Omer from Kandahar who had the ambitious agenda of liberating the country from the clutches of various embroiled *Mujahidin* groups. The Taliban ruled over majority of Afghanistan till they were toppled by the US led ISAF in post-9/11 war of terror campaign in 2001) on the political theater of Afghanistan. Though the Taliban succeeded in capturing majority of the areas of Afghanistan; however, because of their revolutionary and radical rule as well as inability in the modern international political issues, most of the global players turned against this regime.¹⁶ The Taliban also bitterly failed in addressing majority of the genuine apprehensions of the rest of the world, mainly for hosting and supporting the

¹¹ Margesson, Rhoda. "Afghan refugees: Current status and future prospects." LIBRARY OF CONGRESS WASHINGTON DC CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE, 2007.

¹² Simes, Dimitri K. "Gorbachev: A new foreign policy?." *Foreign Affairs* 65, no. 3 (1986): 477-500.

¹³ Zemtsova, Natalia. "Mikhail Gorbachev and His Role in the Peaceful Solution of the Cold War." (2011).

¹⁴ Katz, Mark. "Lessons of the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan." *Middle East Policy Council* (March 9, 2011), <http://www.mepc.org/articles-commentary/commentary/lessons-sovietwithdrawal-afghanistan> (accessed September 18, 2012). "Will the Taliban Rise Again (2011).

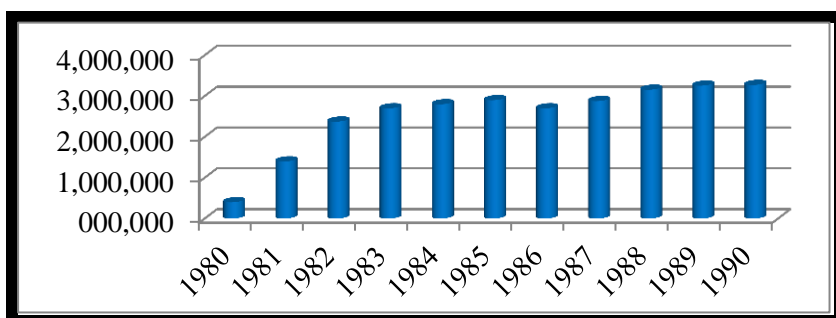
¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Auerswald, David P., and Stephen M. Saideman. *NATO in Afghanistan: fighting together, fighting alone*. Princeton University Press, 2014.

Al-Qaida operatives and its chief, Osama bin Laden, the alleged mastermind of September, 11 terrorist attacks on the US.¹⁷ Eventually, the American launched 'Global War on Terror' on Afghanistan and the Taliban regime in Kabul collapsed within just a few weeks.¹⁸ However, all these developments could not choke the miseries and encumbrances of Afghan people within and outside the country nor that of the Afghan refugees' largest hosting state, Pakistan.

One of the most distressing features of the Afghan conflicts in the past several decades has been the enormous evacuation of refugees to the neighboring countries especially, Pakistan. Even several weeks prior to the Soviet intrusion in Afghanistan, shortly after the 1978 coup by Nur Muhammad Tarakai the situation in Kabul was so startling that more than 200,000 Afghans had migrated to Pakistan.¹⁹ These numbers of the refugees were further augmented by the incursion of Soviet troops in Kabul. During the early 1980s on average about 90,000 a month Afghans entered into Pakistan and prior to the mid-1980s, the number of refugees in Pakistan were well above the figures of three million.²⁰

Table 1: Yearly Population Chart of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan (1980-1990)²¹



However, in April 1988 the major players involved in the Afghan conflict; the US, the USSR, Pakistan and Afghanistan signed the Geneva Accords.²²

¹⁷ Schweitzer, Yoram, and Sari Goldstein Ferber. *Al-Qaeda and the internationalization of suicide terrorism*. Tel Aviv University, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2005.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Braithwaite, Rodric. "The Russians in Afghanistan." *Asian Affairs* 42, no. 2 (2011): 213-229.

²⁰ World Bank. "The impacts of refugees on neighboring countries: A development challenge." (2010).

²¹ Yearly Population of Afghans in Pakistan (UNHCR Reports, 1980 ~1990)

²² Noorani, Zain. "The Geneva Accords and Afghanistan." *Pakistan Horizon* 41, No. 3 (1988): 50-69.

Eventually the Soviet troops pulled out from Afghanistan in February 1989 and Pakistan anticipated an enormous return of the Afghan refugees from the country, but the passive response from the international community, lack of political will from Islamabad, the protracted stay of Najibullah's regime in Kabul and the unpredictable security circumstances in Afghanistan collectively marred the aspirations of Pakistan regarding the repatriation of Afghan refugees from its soil. However, in 1992 the formation of Afghan Interim Islamic Government (AIIG) and the encashment program for the Afghan refugees in 'Operation Salam'²³ (an operation launched by the UNHCR to provide country-wide rehabilitation assistance, with particular emphasis on the 14 provinces from which a third or more of the population had become refugees. Since some parts of the country were still affected by combat, it was envisaged that the work would proceed initially in so-called "zones of tranquility) invigorated the repatriation. However, the *Operation Salam* initiated repatriation process was spoiled due to the shortage of funds, the fragmentation of AIIG and lastly, the emergence of the Taliban.²⁴

Repatriation in the Post-Soviet Withdrawal Era

Ever since the Soviet incursion in Afghanistan, Pakistan has been patently demanding the repatriation of Afghan refugees at the earliest. In April 1992, the long-awaited stepping down of Dr Najibullah and the transfer of power to the coalition government of *Mujahidin*; ensued a massive repatriation program.²⁵ This repatriation was also requested and resulted due to the presence of interim setup in power, which had to pull the refugees back home to mark the confidence of various stakeholders within and outside Afghanistan. Islamabad celebrated its triumph over the Soviet's withdrawal and the annexation of AIIG in Kabul; the Afghans cherished the ouster of Dr Najib from the Afghan Presidency and the assumption of *Mujahidin* government as a political victory over the Russian forces and its communist agenda.

The Afghan refugees in Pakistan were enthusiastic for their timely repatriation and the new regime in Kabul also had the aspiration that they must return back to their native country. For most of the refugees were stout supporters and allies of the *Mujahidin* during the struggle against Soviet forces. In April 1992, there were around three million registered and another half a million un-registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the UNHCR

²³ Nasreen Ghufuran, "The politics of repatriation: A case of afghan refugee repatriation from Pakistan 1989-2003." PhD diss., University of Peshawar, 2004.

²⁴ Formoli, Tareq A. "Impacts of the Afghan-Soviet War on Afghanistan's Environment: Short Communications & Reports." *Environmental Conservation* 22, no. 1 (1995): 66-69.

²⁵ Maley, William. "The Interregnum of Najibullah, 1989–1992." In *The Afghanistan Wars*, pp. 168-193. Palgrave, London, 2002.

was ready to assist the returnees.²⁶ On the other hand, Islamabad was more anxious about the repatriation of registered refugees than the unregistered, as somehow they themselves were looking after their issues and the later were supposedly putting lesser encumbrances on their host, Pakistan. However, the strategy of repatriating huge numbers of Afghans also opened the new debate for assuming that the government of Pakistan and the international community had unfettered themselves from the responsibility of providing assistance to the newly arrived unregistered refugees in Pakistan.²⁷

The 1992 Encashment Program as a Component of the Operation Salaam

According to this encashment program a special scheme of repatriation was announced for those Afghans in Pakistan who possessed the valid registration documents and they were willing for returning to Afghanistan. The refugees were offered US Dollar 100 cash grant as traveling expenses in addition to 300 Kilograms of wheat as food support, but for this assistance they had to cancel their passbooks, a registration document.²⁸ The assistance package was offered to Afghan refugees in Pakistan with a permission to decide freely if and when to return to their native country. Simultaneously, the United Nations launched '*Operation Salam*' in Afghanistan to address the challenges of reintegration and resettlement. The UN had also requested huge funds from the world community to manage the basic necessities for millions of helpless returnees and the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan.²⁹ By early 1992, the refugees' agency, the UNHCR had established numerous encashment centers; eventually, by summer up to 100,000 Afghans were leaving for Afghanistan on weekly basis and by the end of the year around 1.3 million Afghan refugees had already benefited from the repatriation assistance package.³⁰

Though, the UNHCR had characterised the 1992 repatriation plan as the biggest and fastest program ever assisted by the international refugee agency in its history,³¹ yet several weaknesses were identified in this repatriation program. Right from its onslaught the '*Operation Salam*' ran

²⁶ Dr Fayyaz, "Pakistan Counter-terrorism (CT)-Afghan Refugee Question." *South Asian Studies* 33, No. 2 (2020).

²⁷ Ruiz, Hiram. "Repatriation: Tackling Protection and Assistance Concerns.'" *World Refugee Survey* 1993 (1993): 20-29.

²⁸ Nasreen Ghufra, 2004

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Hiram Ruiz, (1993): 20-29.

³¹ Ruiz, Hiram A., Bill Frelick, and Margaret Emery. *Pakistan: Afghan refugees shunned and scorned*. Immigration and Refugee Services of America, (2001): p. 18.

into financial and logistic quandaries for the trivial interests shown to it from Washington and the rest of the actors of the international community; hence the encashment program had to be terminated primarily because of the deficiency of funds.³² Later on, this mega operation allegedly proved as a more "de-registration," exercise of the refugees than the repatriation plan; in addition to a large number of uncertainties on the part of the UNHCR itself.³³

On the other hand, there was no surety about those who cancelled their passbooks and they had actually returned to Afghanistan, while a large number of refugees opted to shift from the refugees' camps to the major urban centers of their host, Pakistan. These assisted Afghans established new businesses on the remunerations they had already received through the assistance package. Owing to a very huge number of returnees, the UNHCR and the Pakistani officials could not thoroughly screen out the crossing points at the Pak-Afghan border to ascertain the actual statistics of the repatriation. Majority of the repatriated Afghans basically came from the Afghan districts that are closer to the Durand Line and they had to overcome tiniest hurdles in crossing over back to Pakistan as recyclers, as and when they faced grave situation in their country of origin. Pakistan also expressed its anxieties over the puerile attitude of the world especially the West, predominantly after a strident drop in financial assistance from the donors for the repatriating Afghan refugees. In early 1990s as a result of the Pressler Amendment³⁴ not only the US assistance to Pakistan was ceased by the Bush senior administration but Islamabad had to face military and economic sanctions.³⁵

The Repatriation Trends in the Taliban Era

The ascendance of Taliban as a resilient force in Afghanistan deeply convoluted the sociopolitical construction of the country. By the end of 1996, the Taliban had established their sturdy control upon the major cities of Afghanistan. At the same time in its resolve to have benign trade routes with Central Asian States through Afghanistan, Pakistan assumed that the Taliban regime would prove comparatively advantageous for Islamabad's interests in the region. On the other hand, ever since decades, for the first time anti-Indian actor seized the helms of affairs in Kabul and above all, the

³² Nasreen Ghufuran, 2004

³³ Turton, David, and Peter Richard Valentine Marsden. *Taking refugees for a ride?: the politics of refugee return to Afghanistan*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 2002.

³⁴ Mahmood, Tehmina. "Pressler Amendment and Pakistan's security concerns." *Pakistan Horizon* 47, no. 4 (1994): 97-107.

³⁵ Nasreen Ghufuran, 2004

phenomena of the so called “*Strategic Depth*” (a concept in which Pakistan aimed to use Afghanistan as an instrument of strategic security in ongoing tensions with India by attempting to control Afghanistan as a pawn for its own political purposes) seemed fairly attainable.³⁶ Though some improvement in the overall stability of Afghanistan was evident during the Taliban control, yet owing to persistent pugnaciousness in the country merely 0.27 million Afghan refugees returned back to their country from Pakistan during 1995-96.³⁷

The UNHCR and the World Food Program (WFP) sacked their food assistance program for most of the refugees residing in camps during the Taliban era, at the same time Pakistan allegedly nodded this move; since all the three players expected least dependency of Afghans upon them and the refugees would eventually rushed for their timely repatriation.³⁸ Nevertheless, the hopes of the three refugees’ assisting players, particularly that of Islamabad, were severely shattered as majority of refugees preferred to migrate into the major cities of Pakistan for searching better employments and businesses that further pressurized the country’s overall urban job market and also exaggerated the resentment of the hosting population against the presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.³⁹ Despite additional sufferings and hardships in Pakistan no surged was seen in the pace of refugees’ repatriation to Afghanistan. As a result of bloody fighting between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance and one of the worst droughts in the history of Afghanistan, in the year 2000 another influx of around 172,000 refugees into Pakistan was monitored; while during this year the number of repatriated Afghans could touch the figure of 77,000 only.⁴⁰

The jubilation of returnees got bitterly faded, for they had to confront additional challenges during their resettlement in Afghanistan. The absence of a united central regime, accepted and respected by majority of the Afghan people was perhaps one of the hardest challenges. Though the war against Communist regime in Afghanistan and the subsequent civil war in the country had concluded, but a new battle of dominating Kabul still continued. The protracted conflict, heavy bombings and deadly shelling of rockets and mortars on the public and private properties had turned the country into ashes, which further horrified the refugees in their motherland. Eventually, the availability of more promising situation in Pakistan and the presence of almost dysfunctional border management around 2600 kms stretched border, the Durand Line, attracted back the refugees as recyclers

³⁶ Rashid, A., 1999. The Taliban: exporting extremism. *Foreign Affairs*, pp.22-35.

³⁷ UNHCR. "Populations of Concern to UNHCR: A Statistical Overview." (1996).

³⁸ Nasreen Ghufraan, 2004

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

into Pakistan. As a whole, the repatriation program launched in 1992 ostensibly displayed some comprehensive plans for managing the return of millions of Afghans and the engineers of the sketch unhesitatingly proclaimed it as a success story, but the perpetual unrest and lasting instability in Afghanistan are held responsible for spoiling the whole efforts instead of offering some kind of relief to miseries of the returnees.⁴¹

During the last months of the year 2000, responding to the new influxes of Afghans as well as the icy attitude of the world community, Islamabad announced to cordon off its Afghan border.⁴² However, due to the highly porous nature of the Pak-Afghan border, historically its closure had hardly ever been fully effective, except the recent measures taken by Pakistan to fence the border. Pakistani officials stringently demanded the current Afghan passport and valid Pakistani visa from the Afghans at the time of their entry to Pakistan. Simultaneously, the authorities started insisting that the Afghan refugees found in the urban centers had to present these valid travel documents; otherwise they would face enforced deportation. This stringent stance from Islamabad towards the Afghan refugees continued till the onslaught of US lead military action in Afghanistan by October 2001, in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist's attacks in the United States. Hence, once again Pakistan had to suffer from new influxes of Afghan refugees with greater numbers and additional challenges. During the past few decades the Afghans either left their homeland for taking refuge or left for their motherland with a label of returnees for several times, predominantly because of the presence of multiple attraction and repulsion features on both sides of the Durand-Line.⁴³

Subsequently, during the Taliban era the overall statistics of the recyclers to Pakistan were much higher as compared to those refugees who opted to voluntarily repatriate to Afghanistan. The imbalance was further deteriorated by the post-9/11 US lead global war on terror campaign in Afghanistan and eventually another huge influx of around 1.5 million Afghan refugees to Pakistan was ensued.⁴⁴

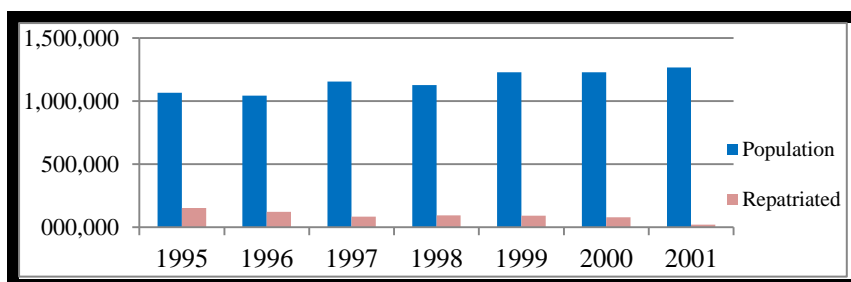
⁴¹ Nurani, J., A. Saboor, M. Kamran, Z. Saify, A. Ibrahimi, A. Shikaib, and Y. Torabi. "Integration of returnees in the Afghan labor market." (2006).

⁴² Nasreen Ghufraan, 2004

⁴³ Rashid, Umar. "UNHCR in Pakistan: Analyzing the Global Governance Regime-Repatriation of Afghan Refugees from Pakistan." *LUMS LJ* 6 (2019): 31.

⁴⁴ Ahmad, Waseem. "The Fate of Durable Solutions in Protracted Refugee Situations: The Odyssey of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan." *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 15, no. 3 (2017).

Table 2: Yearly Population of Afghan Refugees and Returnees in Pakistan (1995-2001)⁴⁵



Repatriation of Afghan Refugees in the Post 9/11 Era

At the dawn of the 21st century, the 9/11 incident can be marked as one of the most crucial incidents of the contemporary international politics. Similarly, the year 2002 could be readily called a landmark period in the modern history of Afghanistan. Apart from many other crucial developments, this year almost 1.5 million Afghans chose to voluntarily repatriate to their native country from Pakistan hoping extraordinary prospects of large scale rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in Afghanistan. The government of Pakistan, the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MORR) and the UNHCR collectively endeavored to facilitate the voluntary return of millions of refugees to Afghanistan. Even if, the repatriation plan was fabricated to have been exercised purely on humanitarian grounds, still it was not crafted short of achieving political objectives of numerous global actors. A number of political features may also have played vibrant role in influencing the refugees for repatriating to Afghanistan from Pakistan and from all over the world in such huge numbers. It is pertinent to mention that these measures were taken without having scrupulously analyzed the endless predicaments in the decades-long war trodden, Afghanistan.

The engrossment of the sole superpower in the unipolar system that was backed by almost the whole world together with international governmental and non- governmental organizations (IOs and NGOs) offered the canvas in Afghanistan as if opened to paint it, according to the will and wish of Washington. The refugees in Pakistan passionately returned to Afghanistan despite tenacious security issues and delicate infrastructure in majority of the areas in Afghanistan. In this inclusive repatriation drive Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR collectively assisted up to around 1.8

⁴⁵ Yearly Population of Afghans and Returnees (UNHCR, 1995 ~ 2001)

million refugees in returning back to their homeland; and it was ascribed as the world's biggest repatriation exercised in the past thirty years.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the huge presence of a number of key actors from all over the world in Kabul had also raised a sense of confidence in the socioeconomic strength and enhanced security situation of Afghanistan. It can be stated that the start of the 2002 repatriation was exceedingly enormous in various aspects. It was primarily because of a wide-ranging participation of numerous international as well as regional actors. At the end of the day, these developments were also an indication of confidence from the Afghans on the newly instated regime in Kabul and above all a matter of even greater credibility for the UNHCR itself.

In early 2002 the declaration of UNHCR regarding the repatriation of almost 0.8 million refugees seemed unfeasible to some of the observers.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, as soon as the agency operated its repatriation centers in various cities of Pakistan, hundreds of thousands of refugees rushed for the registration to avail the UNHCR assisted repatriation program. In May and June 2002, on daily basis up to 10,000 applications were being submitted to the repatriation centers and the already set target exceeded in only a short span of about fifteen weeks of the announcement.⁴⁸ For the first time, the Iris Technology was launched by the UNHCR to check the Afghan recyclers from getting unlawful repatriation assistance at the Quetta and Peshawar Voluntary Repatriation Centers (VRCs).⁴⁹ Every Afghan above the age of 16 years, looking for assisted repatriation plan had to come across an Iris scanning process that was transformed into a kind of digital code in recorded database, maintained in respect of the Afghan refugees.⁵⁰

The Role of 'Pull and Push' Factors amid Returnees and Recyclers

The swing of returnees and recyclers has been the outcome of some major 'Pull and Push' factors on either sides of the Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Although, Islamabad never accredited to the refugees related international conventions, yet it has been upholding her pledges of the Geneva Accords, signed in 1988. The accord ascertained that

⁴⁶ Peter Kessler. Afghanistan Humanitarian Update No. 67. *UNHCR*. 2003, January 03. Retrieved @ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/updates/2003/1/3e15b2184/afghanistan-humanitarian-update-67.html>

⁴⁷ Nasreen Ghufraan, 2004.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Peter Kessler, 2003

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Jacobsen, Katja Lindskov. "Experimentation in humanitarian locations: UNHCR and biometric registration of Afghan refugees." *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 2 (2015): 144-164.

the repatriation of Afghans refugees from Pakistan would be predominantly voluntary, and the Afghans, hardly ever possessing the lawful traveling documents, have been unrestrainedly benefiting from the phenomena of voluntariness and therefore several thousand people have been crossing the Pak-Afghan border on daily basis with various pretexts.⁵¹

Pakistan has patiently lifted the encumbrance of millions of Afghans for decades. However, Islamabad has also been expressing its resentment that owing to the distressing socio-economic situation of the country, many a times it has to harden its policy towards Afghan refugees/recyclers who have allegedly added to the escalation of social crimes, drugs and human trafficking, kidnapping for ransom and even the cases of prostitution in the country.⁵² Being perplexed by their uncertain future in exile, the Afghans in 2002 decided to return to their native country well in time, with an idea, the sooner the better. In addition, the US launched global 'War on Terror' (WoT) campaign knocked down the Taliban. As an interim measure a new political regime headed by Hamid Karzai was constituted in Kabul that helped in fascinating the refugees to go back to Afghanistan.

On the other hand, the presence of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the key areas of Afghanistan also captivated the refugees who were anticipating glorious future in Afghanistan. In a personal interview with Mr. Zahir Shah, an official in Afghan refugees' camp in Pakistan stated that the refugees rushed for the repatriation with higher degree of expectations in their homeland. The Bonn Accords, accredited in 2001, also significantly helped in assuring the internal and external stakeholders including the refugees in Pakistan to foresee a brighter future of the Afghan people.⁵³ Finally, the arrangement and execution of the Afghan *Loya Jirga* (A special type of Jirga, grand meeting or legal assembly, mainly organized for choosing a new head of state in case of sudden death, adopting a new constitution, or to settle national or regional issues such as war) in 2002, which was also attended by the ex-King Zahir Shah (the son of Muhammad Nader Shah, Zahir Shah (1914-2007) remained the king of Afghanistan from 1933 to 1973, who delivered an era of stable government to his country); enticed the Afghans from all over the world to come back to Afghanistan and take part in the restructuring and rebuilding of their native country.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibrahim Shinwari. Thousands of Afghans cross Torkham after relaxation in travel rules. Dawn. April 8, 2020. Retrieved @ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1547299>

⁵² UNHCR. "Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection." (1996).

⁵³ Fields, Mark, and Ramsha Ahmed. "A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference and application to the road ahead in Afghanistan." (2011).

⁵⁴ Ibid

At the same time, the announcement of billions of dollars assistance, pledged by various donors from all over the world was also an element of highly mesmerizing substance for the investors along with the refugees, who were anticipating wide ranging development and rebuilding program in Afghanistan. The new administration in Kabul also urged the Afghans to come back and take part in rejuvenation of their country also enthralled the Afghans in huge numbers to repatriate. Hence, the repatriation started with highly encouraging statistics; however, numerous inadequacies were identified by various analysts simultaneously. The lack of appropriate remedial actions regarding the hurdles, not only slanted the mega repatriation plan rather pushed it to a more or less failure.⁵⁵

Majority of the key players; Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States were purportedly trying to manipulate the state of affairs in their own favor. Pakistan wanted to gain the favour of global community to assist the Afghan refugees in their return; the interim Kabul regime needed to draw the Afghans worldwide to establish its internal and external credibility; while Washington aimed to validate its claim of liberating the Afghan people from the dogmatic Taliban regime through the so called 'Operation Enduring Freedom' (*the OEF was the official name used by the US government for Global WoT. On 7 October 2001, in response to the 9/11 attacks, President Bush announced that airstrikes targeting Al-Qaeda and the Taliban had begun in Afghanistan. The OEF primarily referred to the War in Afghanistan but it was also affiliated with counterterrorism operations in other countries*) in Afghanistan.⁵⁶

Defying Challenges to Repatriated Refugees in Afghanistan

Undoubtedly, the repatriation process of 2002 started promptly, demonstrating some promising emblems in the beginning. However, later on the exercise of coming back home of more than two million Afghan refugees seemed to be relatively premature and they had to face stark challenges in their native country. Even the UNHCR's officials had to admit the shortcomings in the repatriation process as Rudd Lubbers, the then Commissioner of the agency stated that Afghanistan had been too decent on repatriation; however, there were number of issues related to security and other associated matters with sufficient room for improvement."⁵⁷

The power vacuum during the past few decades resulted into physical and economic uncertainty, chaotic law and order situation, crimes,

⁵⁵ Nasreen Ghufuran, 2004

⁵⁶ Lewis, Adrian R. *The American culture of war: A history of US military force from World War II to Operation Enduring Freedom*. Routledge, 2014.

⁵⁷ 8 UNHCR, "Lubbers Happy with Returns, but Worried About Reintegration," News Stories, August 28, 2002

racism and sectarian violence throughout Afghanistan. Similarly, the country has also been facing numerous distressing challenges like; the growing number of human rights abuses, ever growing cases of mistreatment of women, exploitation of children, disputes on properties and possessions, lodging and shelter scarcities, dearth of food and water facilities, nonexistence of health care as well as educational provisions, deficiency of jobs and economic undertakings.⁵⁸ At the same time, unrelenting bombings and inexorable shelling by the NATO forces also horribly threatened the returnees in Afghanistan who opted to recycle back to Pakistan too shortly but massively.⁵⁹

The voluntary repatriation of 2002 was huge but also subject to sever accusations from various political analysts for its discrepancies and premature accomplishment. The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), a Kabul based non-governmental organization, also came up with a severe criticism over an almost thoughtless and mega repatriation exercise of almost two million refugees to the decades long war-ridden Afghanistan, which was unable to provide basic facilities of human life and categorically labeled the mass repatriation as premature, rushed and even misguided.⁶⁰ The director of The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Andrew Wilder also pointed out that the mistakes were marked by the world community and the Kabul administration in cheering such a huge number of refugees to return without ensuring extensive arrangement prior to the arrival of refugees enormously.⁶¹

On the one hand, the Hamid Karzai's regime seemingly had neither the appropriate capacity nor a suitable mandate to control the overall situation in the country. At the same time, the ISAF continued its lethal bombing operations also engendered a sense of awful insecurity in the Afghans, who as usual had the readily available option of crossing the border and finding refuge in the neighboring Pakistan. During the succeeding years, the number of returnees from Pakistan declined; rather those of the recyclers surged significantly. These returnees to Pakistan became more susceptible than they were in the past, since they had lost their previous households, businesses, employments and even their chums in the country.

Deen Muhammad, an Afghan residing in the refugee camp in Pakistan during a personal conversation with the researcher drew a dismal picture of the situation by stating that the collapse of Taliban and the

⁵⁸ Nasreen Ghufraan, 2004

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Wilder, Andrew R. *Cops or Robbers?: The Struggle to Reform the Afghan National Police*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007

⁶¹ Ibid.

resumption of Karzai regime in Kabul attracted the refugees in Pakistan who were highly fervent to return their native country.⁶² The Afghans sold all their households and started a mystifying journey to Afghanistan but found nothing what they had anticipated in their country. According to interviewee, the repatriated Afghans had no better choice other than recycling back to Pakistan, the second home of the Afghans.⁶³

Provision of the Legal Framework for Afghan refugees in Pakistan

Pakistan's policy towards the Afghan refugees has mostly been pigeonholed as being short of some appropriate legal coverage. Nevertheless, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UNHCR reached an agreement in October 2002, which for the first time provided the legal framework and contrivance for the repatriation of refugees, continued since last three decades.⁶⁴ The covenant basically consisted of a three year plan (2003-2005), demonstrating that the United Nations High Commission for Refugees was bound to carry on its assistance in gradual, organized and voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan.⁶⁵ The accord aimed to address the voluntary repatriation of the existing Afghan refugees only, whose figures persistently increased because of the meager economic and security conditions in Afghanistan.

However, no clarification was made by the stakeholders for the developments arising after three years of the initial covenant. The on ground circumstances in Afghanistan were not properly evaluated and the entire repatriation strategy of the refugees was hastily decided. This tripartite covenant did not express the ultimate solution to the decades-long issue, but it was the foundation towards the resolution strategy towards this grave challenge. Neither the miseries of Afghan refugees nor the genuine concerns of the host, Pakistan, were thoroughly assessed, particularly in case of the fiasco of the agreement.

The Repatriation Trends in the Post 2002 Era

Subsequent to the 2002 enormous program, the ensuing chapter of repatriation of Afghan refugees was comparatively less promising. Hypothetically, the refugees stayed back in their host country were economically better placed, and majority of the left-over Afghans rejoiced

⁶² Deen Muhammad, an Afghan residing at the refugee camp in the Haripur District of Pakistan; narrated the situation in Personal Interview with the researcher, (2015).

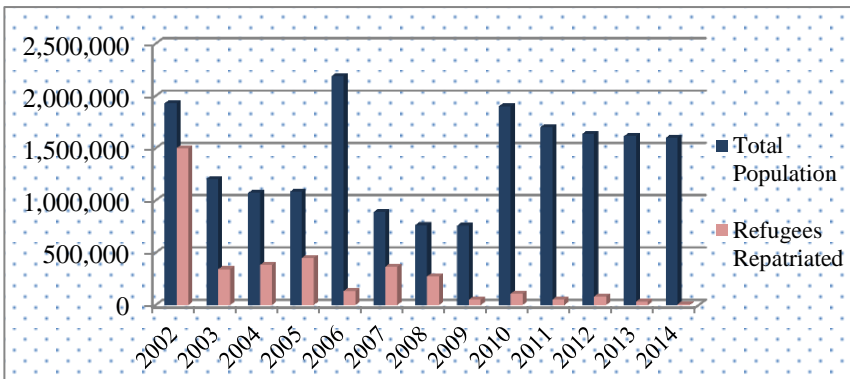
⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Nasreen Ghufuran. "Afghan refugees in Pakistan current situation and future scenario." *Policy perspectives* (2006): 83-104.

⁶⁵ *ibid*

the luxury of superior urban facilities in various metropolitan cities of Pakistan. During the year 2003, up to only around 0.343 million Afghan refugees repatriated to Afghanistan from Pakistan and these figures is only about 10 per cent of the previous year.⁶⁶ The newly arising various significant developments such as the 2003 Tripartite Treaty, the 2003 assassination attempts against the Pakistani President, General Pervez Musharraf,⁶⁷ the 2004 stringent military operations conducted by Pakistani Army in South Waziristan,⁶⁸ the closure of refugee camps especially in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in 2005;⁶⁹ obviously worked as the push factors for the Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Table 3: Ratio of Afghan Refugees’ Population and Repatriation Data⁷⁰



Consequently, since 2002 till the end of 2006, the overall figures of repatriated Afghans from Pakistan crossed three millions.⁷¹ Undoubtedly, this repatriation course displayed highly fascinating statistics in its early month, but in every passing year, these figures plunged downward. According to UNHCR, in 2002 almost 90 percent of the standing Afghan populace in Pakistan repatriated to the country of their origin; however, by 2014 the proportion of repatriated Afghans as compared to the existing

⁶⁶ UNHCR, 2003 country operations profile- Pakistan, <http://www.unhcr.org>.

⁶⁷ Salman Masood. PAKISTANI LEADER ESCAPES ATTEMPT AT ASSASSINATION. *The New York Times*. 2003 December, 26.

⁶⁸ Chandran, Suba. *Military Operations in South Waziristan: Issues and Implications*. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies., 2004.

⁶⁹ Suba Chandran. *Military Operations in South Waziristan: Issues and Implications*. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies., 2004.

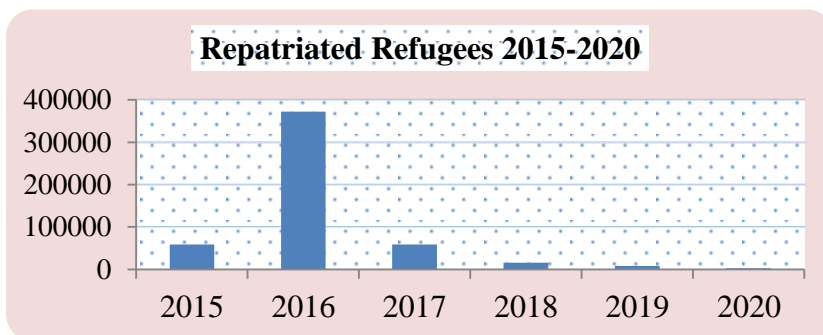
⁷⁰ Afghan Refugees’ Population and Repatriation Data: UNHCR (2002–2014)

⁷¹ UNHCR Reports, 2003–2006 country operations profile- Pakistan, <http://www.unhcr.org>.

population of refugees in Pakistan plunged down to only around 0.6 percent, the all-time lowest figures of the past ever since the inception of repatriation in early 1990s.⁷²

However, the December 16, 2014 incident of Army Public School (APS) Peshawar and the highly stringent response from the civil and military establishment, especially that the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa transformed the dynamics of security scenario and ultimately the state of affairs for the Afghan refugees in Pakistan.⁷³ However, in 2015 only about 58,000 Afghan refugees repatriated from Pakistan; but in 2016 these figures rose up to around 0.373 million, demonstrating the highest figures ever in the past one and half decades, but since then the numbers have dropped to only a few thousand in the past two years.⁷⁴ Hence, during the first one and half decades of the 21st century, as a whole around four million registered Afghan refugees availed the assisted repatriation programme from Pakistan to Afghanistan;⁷⁵ but in the next half decade these figures are not more than just half a million.⁷⁶

Table 4: The Afghan Refugees Repatriation Data 2015-2020⁷⁷



⁷² UNHCR Reports, 2002~2014 country operations profile- Pakistan, <http://www.unhcr.org>.

⁷³ KAROCK, Ulrich. "The Peshawar Army Public School Attack: From Nightmare to Greater Darkness?." *Directorate-General For External Policies-Policy Department* 18.

⁷⁴ Trends, UNHCR Global. "United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2016." (2016). Accessed @<http://www.unhcr.org/statistics>.

⁷⁵ UNHCR Reports, 2002 ~ 2014 country operations profile- Pakistan, <http://www.unhcr.org>.

⁷⁶ Report, UNHCR Global. "United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2020." (2020). Accessed @<http://www.unhcr.org/statistics>.

⁷⁷ UNHCR Global Report, 2020. Accessed @ <http://www.unhcr.org>.

Roadmap to the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees

Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and the UNHCR, in 2011, reached a multi-year solutions strategy for Afghan refugees (SSAR) and their voluntary repatriation, with cross border coordination in the concerned states.⁷⁸ In 2012, a similar kind of meeting was arranged in Geneva to coordinate the execution of the new SSAR. The meeting was attended by numerous diplomats, major donors, IOs and aid reputable agencies to certify the new approach and seek assistance in managing the required financial support, necessary for the voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration of refugees in the host countries. As a result of such extraordinary meetings in 2012 Islamabad extended the stay of Afghans in Pakistan until June next year.⁷⁹ Since then this non-terminating course of extensions in refugees stay in Pakistan has been extended repeatedly.

In 2013, Islamabad sanctioned its National Policy on Afghan refugees, perhaps the first time, focusing on effective execution of SSAR and to support Kabul in expanding social, educational as well as professional prospects for the Afghan refugees.⁸⁰ Islamabad also expressed its apprehension upon the lack of ability of Kabul in taking appropriate measures for the resettlement of repatriated refugees in Afghanistan. However, Islamabad extended the validity of refugees' Proof of Registration (PoR) cards and further extended the deadline for their repatriation till December 2015.⁸¹

The introduction of tighter security and immigration arrangements across the Pak-Afghan border, the stiffer demand of Islamabad for legal traveling document from the Afghans to arrive into Pakistan, the UNHCR's expansion of the voluntary repatriation endowment from US\$200 to US\$400 in 2016 considerably contributed in increasing the number of returnees from Pakistan.⁸² The Afghan MORR also launched a campaign in Pakistan that encouraged the refugees to return home by raising the slogan *Khpal Watan, Gul Watan*⁸³ (your motherland, your beautiful motherland) that also boosted the numbers of repatriating refugees to their home country. The wide-ranging arrangements, especially the strict operations launched by the security forces of Pakistan also supplemented the upsurge of repatriated

⁷⁸ UNHCR Report, 2012 country operations profile- Pakistan, <http://www.unhcr.org>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ UNHCR Reports, 2013 country operations profile- Pakistan, <http://www.unhcr.org>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² UNHCR, 2016.

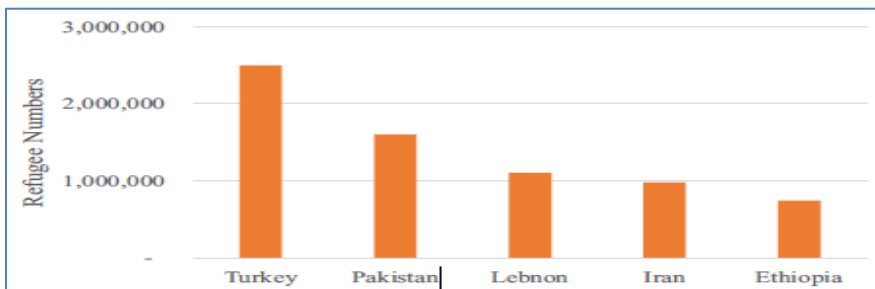
⁸³ UNHCR, Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Update: 10,225 Afghan Refugees Returned since January 2018. July, 2018. Accessed @ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/65330.pdf>

Afghans. However, the Pakistani authorities further extended the validity of POR cards held by the Afghan refugees until September, 2018.⁸⁴

The Overall Prospects and Challenges to the Repatriation of Afghan Refugees

Pakistan has never ratified the international refugees' conventions; still it holds the title of the second largest refugee hosting state in the world.⁸⁵ However, paradoxically, Islamabad could neither table a comprehensive and consistent policy for millions of Afghan refugees nor priorities their repatriation according to its national interests. In the beginning of Afghan conflict, Pakistan cheered the refugees without any international legal assurances; later on it felt weary of this liability.

Table 5: World's Largest Refugee Hosting Countries



The Durand Line, more than 2600 kilometer stretched, has remained one of the mostly loosely watched borders in the world. It consists of terrains that had multiple identified and unidentified crossing points from where this porous border has been easily breached by the Afghans as well as other miscreants, who would easily trigger destabilization on either side, particularly in Pakistan. The border between the two neighbors remained perhaps more muddled than any other official border in the world, as around 50,000 people used to cross it daily.⁸⁶

However, in the past few years Pakistan has started to fence the Pak-Afghan border that has certainly improved the crossing activities across the Durand- line. On the other hand, the presence of millions of Afghans in Pakistan has been a perpetual threat as the terrorist attacks all over the

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ UNHCR. (2017). Mid-year trend 2016. Geneva, Switzerland: (UNHCR), the UN Refugee Agency. Retrieved <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/58aa8f247/mid-year-trends-june-2016.html>.

⁸⁶ Nasreen Ghufraan, 2004.

country during the past several years allegedly had held their links with the cross border elements after appropriate investigations. The unrest in Baluchistan has also been reportedly fueled from Afghanistan. The authorities of Pakistan reiterate that the national interest of the country rigorously demands a comprehensive repatriation plan, backed by the UNHCR and the international community.

The masses and business community of Pakistan maintain that the Afghan refugees are an enormous economic liability on the country's overall job market; for statistics reveal that virtually every tenth Afghani citizen has been looked after by Islamabad since last four decades.⁸⁷ Majority of the business centers in Pakistan have a large number of *Bara Shops (shops for goods smuggled to Pakistan through Afghanistan)*, filled with illegally smuggled goods from all over the world via Afghanistan. According to the vice president of KPK Chamber of Commerce and Industries:

*“Afghans run 10,000 of the estimated 20,000 shops in Peshawar; but since they are not registered residents, they are not subject to the same taxes as Pakistani shop-owners. ... His department has been “urging” the federal government to repatriate Afghans so locals can continue to do their trade. He also alleged that refugees’ demand for housing has pushed rents to unaffordable prices”.*⁸⁸

The refugees have been reportedly posturing grave socioeconomic and political complications in different parts of Pakistan. According to the Ministry of Information in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, about 80 percent of crimes have their links with the Afghan refugees.⁸⁹ The Pakhtunkhwa government has repeatedly demanded that the refugees holding POR cards are to be necessarily restricted to the Afghan refugees' camps and those without holding these cards should essentially be expelled to their native country.

The enormous presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan could also initiate incongruence in various political institutions of the country. The federal and provincial authorities have had stark differences on the repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan as being part of ‘National

⁸⁷ According to the Worldometer the population of Afghanistan is around 40 million. The presence of around 4 million Afghans in Pakistan refers to the fact that every 10th Afghan citizen is in Pakistan. Accessed @ <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/afghanistan-population/>

⁸⁸ Roehrs, Christine. "The Refugee Dilemma: Afghans in Pakistan between expulsion and failing aid schemes." *Afghanistan Analysts Network* 9 (2015). Accessed @ <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/migration/the-refugee-dilemma-afghans-in-pakistan-between-expulsion-and-failing-aid-schemes/>

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Action Plan' (NAP), Islamabad's anti-terrorist plan initiated after the 2016 APS incident during all parties meeting. The proclamation from the leader of Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), Mahmood Khan Achakzai, was provoking for many in the country, when he argued that the ill-treatment of Pashtuns and Afghan refugees in Pakistan was not acceptable anymore for his party; he also called the Afghans as brothers and further reiterated that it was up to them to decide about their residence in the host country and they will always be welcomed in Pakistan.⁹⁰

On the other hand, the UNHCR has been giving the impression of mere lobbying for the refugees in Pakistan, in order to gain additional time for the refugees' stay on humanitarian basis; while to some of the analysts, the protracted stay of several million Afghans in Pakistan for decades is more a political than humanitarian issue.⁹¹ Pakistan has always readily extended the refugees stay in the country during the past two decades, the UNHCR and Kabul could have done much more for the rehabilitation of returnees in Afghanistan. The UNHCR has been allegedly attempting premature and flawed strategies, confronting the shortage of funds, in the 1992 and 2002 repatriation plans.⁹² The absence of durable reintegration plan in Afghanistan has been one of the drastic obstacles in the repatriation of Afghans. Ever since the inception of the Afghan conflict, Kabul could neither attract nor assure the Afghans lying as refugees in the neighboring countries, especially in Pakistan.

The returnees in Afghanistan always faced grave security challenges because of the continued unrest in the country in the past four decades. On the contrary, a large number of refugees in Pakistan are likewise frustrated due to trembling political and economic situation of Afghanistan. The repatriated Afghans also confronted the nonexistence of modern infrastructure, highly poor networks of roads and communication, pitiable irrigation and sanitation services, education and health opportunities, land disputes, war-lordship, unlawful taxes particularly in the nonurban areas of the country.⁹³

Apparently Afghanistan has been following the strategy of buck-passing the responsibility on the other's shoulder or 'killing the time and

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ghufuran, Nasreen. "Afghans in Pakistan: A Protracted Refugee Situation." *Policy Perspectives* (2008): 117-129.

⁹² Turton, David, and Peter Richard Valentine Marsden. *Taking refugees for a ride?: the politics of refugee return to Afghanistan*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 2002.

⁹³ Affleck, Rosa T., and Reed B. Freeman. "Challenges for engineering design, construction, and maintenance of infrastructure in Afghanistan." (2010). Accessed @ <https://erdc-library.erd.c.dren.mil/jspui/handle/11681/11815>.

doing nothing'. It has hardly ever seriously owned its several million citizens living as refugees for decades. Though, Kabul is confronting serious challenges; however, when there is a will there is a way' and inspite of thorny features few of the encouraging emblems may also be found in Afghanistan. The ISAF and the US have completed their withdrawal and the Taliban have resumed power in Kabul; above all the regional actors are more interested and involved in resolving the issues in Afghanistan.

The Afghans have the opportunity of demonstrating their resilience to strengthen their country, and ultimately the refugees would also display their trust in Kabul. Consequently, Afghanistan would be capable of attracting the foreign investment and investors; least foreigners will hardly show their trust till its own people do so. The life of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is despondent as they could not find a permanent lodging in the past four decades neither in their country of origin nor refuge. On the other hand despite her economic and security challenges, Pakistan has always been trying its level best to extend greater assistance to Afghanistan and its refugees. However, this ample support might have fallen too trivial as compared to the very high expectations of Kabul, the Afghan political leadership as well as the international community.

Conclusion

In the past four decades, Afghanistan continued to be the land of wars, warriors, weapons and woes for it became the theater of the great powers politics at least for two times. The Russian invasion on Kabul outburst around four million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Initially, the host welcomed them but latter due to her own critical challenges, Islamabad started demanding the repatriation of the several millions Afghans to their native country. Certainly there have been two major repatriation drives in 1992 and 2002, but historically the porous nature of Pak-Afghan border could hardly ever control the recycling of the repatriated Afghans back to Pakistan. Confronting numerous economic, political, social and security challenges, Islamabad marks these Afghans as unavoidable burden on its socioeconomic fabric. However, the presence of a number of pull and push factors across the Durand Line have been the major restriction to the desire of Pakistan.

However, despite highly promising figures of repatriation in 1992 and 2002, the overall myth of repatriation seems to be a failure. The ground realities and associated statistics can clearly identify that the voluntary repatriation of millions of refugees from Pakistan to Afghanistan could only be a fantasy, but not a reality. However, keeping in view the ground realities this research work deems some of the recommendations.

Instead of accepting the enormous challenge of managing issue of several million refugees, right from the early days Islamabad ought to have entreated the international community for a comprehensive and feasible strategy with a time frame, including the challenging task of repatriation. Such measures would have been exceeding helpful in accepting and sharing this colossal responsibility that Pakistan has to handle almost single-handedly. This would not only maximize the prospects of easiness for the host but also facilitated the refugees to repatriate and re-establish their lives in their native country well in time. Pakistan ought to have worked out a comprehensive strategy for efficiently resolving the issue of millions of refugees at its soil. An eloquent, result-oriented and exclusive debate amid the politicians, academics and foreign policy specialists for meticulously deliberating upon such a highly complex and frustrating challenge would help resolving this issue. There is certainly a necessity for doable roadmap demonstrating an explicit and exclusive solution strategy for the possibly earliest repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan.

The corresponding forums in Pakistan need to work for the consensus on the issue of Afghan refugees then they ought to share this viable stratagem with the Afghan authorities, the UNHCR and the global powers and particularly the rising players in the region. Such exclusive efforts would help in resolving the paramount challenge of repatriation and resettlement of millions of Afghans helplessly lying in the neighboring countries for four decades. The phenomena of voluntary repatriation would be beyond imagination without the true participation of all key stakeholders, primarily that of the regional actors. Neither Pakistan nor Afghanistan alone or even collectively have the capacity to resolve the enormous challenge of accommodating several millions Afghan refugees. Therefore, they ought to invite and encourage the international community, mainly some of the unconventional actors for their substantial assistance. Afghanistan shall have to emphasis on issues like reconstruction, capacity building of its economy, law and order and the overall security situation, and other key institutions.

Pakistan requires reinforcing its border management system at various crossing points; else its foe actors on the Afghan side may simply intrude into Pakistan pretending to be the Afghan refugees and challenge the overall law and order and security of the country. Every four out of five refugees in Pakistan come from the eastern districts of Afghanistan, which are ethnically Pashtuns and they can crossover the border on daily basis without stringent control. The Afghans have been exploiting the loose border-management as readily available facility for their seasonal migration, business activities and job opportunities, even on daily basis. It is exceedingly essential for the overall internal security of Pakistan to reinforce the border control management, predominantly at Torkhum and Chaman, the

two busiest crossing points at the Pak-Afghan border. The continued civil war in Afghanistan has always resulted power vacuum and a room for institutional resurrection. The infrastructure has to be revamped; skilled workforce is the need of the hour in order to contribute in the nation building of Afghanistan; rather than being either IDPs in the country or always trying to get refuge in the neighboring states, specifically Pakistan.

In the end, this study highlights that the presence of millions of Afghans on the Pakistani soil is a colossal encumbrance for the host nation that obviously does not possess the exclusive capacity of handling this enormous issue alone. The protracted challenge of repatriating millions of Afghans necessitates some concrete measures pertaining to the sharing of responsibility by various stakeholders. The phenomena of 'Voluntary Repatriation' as desired and demanded by the international community deem greater responsibility and support from the major international actors. Undoubtedly, in the present situation, the national interest of Pakistan demands that the notion of voluntariness is unrealistic and unachievable.

Bibliography

- Affleck, R.T., and Freeman, R.B. "*Challenges for engineering design, construction, and maintenance of infrastructure in Afghanistan.*" 2010. Accessed @ <https://erdc-library.erdcdren.mil/jspui/handle/11681/11815>.
- Ahmad, W. "The Fate of Durable Solutions in Protracted Refugee Situations: The Odyssey of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan." *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 15 (3), 2017
- Ali, Y., Sabir, M. and Muhammad, N. "Refugees and host country nexus: A case study of Pakistan." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 20(1), 2019: 137-153.
- Ames, T.T. "*Factors affecting the repatriation of the Afghan refugees.*" 1992
- Auerswald, D.P., and Stephen M. Saideman. *NATO in Afghanistan: fighting together, fighting alone.* Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Blay, S.K.N. and Tsamenyi, B. M. "Reservations and Declarations under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 2, no. 4 (1990): 527-561.
- Braithwaite, R. "The Russians in Afghanistan." *Asian Affairs* 42(2), 2011: 213-229
- Chandran, S. *Military Operations in South Waziristan: Issues and Implications.* Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2004
- Fayyaz, "Pakistan Counter-terrorism (CT)-Afghan Refugee Question." *South Asian Studies* 33(2), 2020

- Fields, M. and Ahmed, R. *A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference and application to the road ahead in Afghanistan*. 2011
- Formoli, T.A. "Impacts of the Afghan-Soviet War on Afghanistan's Environment: Short Communications & Reports." *Environmental Conservation* 22(1), 1995: 66-69.
- Ghosh, S. and Enami, A. "Do refugee-immigrants affect international trade? Evidence from the world's largest refugee case." *Journal of Policy Modeling* 37(2), 2015: 291-307.
- Ghufran, N. "Afghan refugees in Pakistan current situation and future scenario." *Policy perspectives*, 2006: 83-104.
- Ghufran, N. "Afghans in Pakistan: A Protracted Refugee Situation'." *Policy Perspectives*, 2008: 117-129.
- Ghufran, N. "*The politics of repatriation: A case of afghan refugee repatriation from Pakistan 1989-2003*." PhD diss., University of Peshawar, 2004.
- Jacobsen, K.L. "Experimentation in humanitarian locations: UNHCR and biometric registration of Afghan refugees." *Security Dialogue* 46(2), 2015: 144-164.
- Karock, U. "The Peshawar Army Public School Attack: From Nightmare to Greater Darkness?." *Directorate-General For External Policies-Policy Department* 18.
- Katz, M. "Lessons of the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan." *Middle East Policy Council (March 9, 2011)*, <http://www.mepc.org/articles-commentary/commentary/lessons-sovietwithdrawal-afghanistan> (accessed September 18, 2012). "Will the Taliban Rise Again (2011).
- Kessler, P. *Afghanistan Humanitarian Update No. 67*. UNHCR. 2003, January 03. Retrieved <https://www.unhcr.org/news/updates/2003/1/3e15b2184/afghanistan-humanitarian-update-67.html>
- Kühn, F.P. "Afghanistan and the 'Graveyard of Empires': Blumenberg, under-complex Analogy and Basic Myths in international Politics." In *Myth and narrative in international politics*. pp. 147-172. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Lewis, A.R. *The American culture of war: A history of US military force from World War II to Operation Enduring Freedom*. Routledge, 2014.
- Mahmood, T. "Pressler Amendment and Pakistan's security concerns." *Pakistan Horizon* 47, no. 4 (1994): 97-107
- Maley, W. "The Interregnum of Najibullah, 1989–1992." In *The Afghanistan Wars*, pp. 168-193. London: Palgrave, 2002
- Margesson, R. "Afghan refugees: Current status and future prospects." LIBRARY OF CONGRESS WASHINGTON DC CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE, 2007.

- Masood, S. Pakistani Leader Escapes Attempt at Assassination. *The New York Times*. 2003 December, 26.
- Noorani, Z. "The Geneva Accords and Afghanistan." *Pakistan Horizon* 41(3), 1988: 50-69.
- Rashid, A. The Taliban: exporting extremism. *Foreign Affairs*, 1999: 22-35
- Rashid, U. "UNHCR in Pakistan: Analyzing the Global Governance Regime-Repatriation of Afghan Refugees from Pakistan." *LUMS LJ* 6, 2019
- Roehrs, C. "The Refugee Dilemma: Afghans in Pakistan between expulsion and failing aid schemes." *Afghanistan Analysts Network* 9, 2015. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/migration/the-refugee-dilemma-afghans-in-pakistan-between-expulsion-and-failing-aid-schemes/>
- Ruiz, H.A. "Repatriation: Tackling Protection and Assistance Concerns.'" *World Refugee Survey* 1993: 20-29
- Ruiz, H.A., Bill Frelick, and Margaret Emery. *Pakistan: Afghan refugees shunned and scorned*. Immigration and Refugee Services of America, 2001: p, 18.
- Schoch, R. "Afghan refugees in Pakistan during the 1980s: cold war politics and registration practice. UNHCR; Research Paper No. 157, 2008
- Schweitzer, Y. and Ferber, S.G. *Al-Qaeda and the internationalization of suicide terrorism*. Tel Aviv University, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2005.
- Shinwari. I. Thousands of Afghans cross Torkham after relaxation in travel rules. *Dawn*. April 8, 2020. Retrieved @ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1547299>
- Simes, D.K. "Gorbachev: A new foreign policy?." *Foreign Affairs* 65(3), 1986: 477-500.
- Turton, D. and Marsden, P. R.V. *Taking refugees for a ride?: the politics of refugee return to Afghanistan*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 2002.
- UNHCR Global Report, 2020. Accessed@ <http://www.unhcr.org>.
- UNHCR Global. "United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2016." Accessed <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics>.
- UNHCR Report, country operations profile- Pakistan*, 2012. <http://www.unhcr.org>.
- UNHCR Reports, 2002~2014 country operations profile- Pakistan*, <http://www.unhcr.org>.
- UNHCR, "Lubbers Happy with Returns, but Worried About Reintegration," News Stories, August 28, 2002

- UNHCR, *Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Update: 10,225 Afghan Refugees Returned since January 2018*. July, 2018. Accessed <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/65330.pdf>
- UNHCR. "*Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection*". 1996
- UNHCR. *Mid-year trend 2016*. Geneva: (UNHCR), the UN Refugee Agency, 2017. Retrieved <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/58aa8f247/mid-year-trends-june-2016.html>.
- UNHCR. *Populations of Concern to UNHCR: A Statistical Overview*. 1996
- Weis, P., and Cambridge University. Research Centre for International Law. *The refugee convention, 1951*. Vol. 7. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Wilder, A.R. *Cops or Robbers?: The Struggle to Reform the Afghan National Police*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007
- World Bank. *The impacts of refugees on neighboring countries: A development challenge*. 2010 *Yearly Population of Afghans and Returnees*. UNHCR, 1995 ~ 2001 *Yearly Population of Afghans in Pakistan*. UNHCR Reports, 1980 ~1990 Zemtsova, N. *Mikhail Gorbachev and His Role in the Peaceful Solution of the Cold War*. 2011