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Afghanistan's defining fight: Technocrats vs. strongmen

By [Sudarsan Raghavan](#) April 12 at 9:12 PM

MAZAR-E SHARIF, Afghanistan — A massive portrait of a middle-aged man towers over the Ferris wheel and giant mushrooms at an amusement park here. At night, the image is bathed in an ethereal light, visible from a quarter-mile away.

His admirers call him “Ustad,” or “Teacher.” His critics call him the King.

For more than a decade, Atta Mohammad Noor, governor of Balkh province, has controlled this northern region with an iron hand, imbued with the authority of the freedom fighter he was and the ultra-rich businessman he has become. Guns, militias and guile, as well as his ability to provide security, have made him one of the country's most formidable strongmen.

To many war-weary Afghans, former warlords such as Noor — who are accused of human rights abuses yet rule with impunity — have to be marginalized for the nation to move into a new era. To their supporters, these former warlords remain a bulwark against [the Taliban](#), al-Qaeda and, [possibly, the Islamic State](#), more vital than ever as the U.S. military mission edges to a close.

“If Ustad Atta is ever replaced as governor, there will be chaos here, and it will spread to other provinces,” declared Haji Abdul Wahab, a close friend who manages the park, which Noor built. “He's got a special place in the hearts of Afghan people.”

Noor's rise and endurance is [a legacy of America's longest war](#) and an emblem of a fresh contest for influence. It pits the aspirations of Western-educated technocrats keen to transform Afghanistan against conservative ethnic and tribal strongmen determined to preserve the status quo. That struggle is becoming the definitive battle for the future of every aspect of the country's affairs — from forming a new cabinet to tackling rampant corruption to engaging in peace talks with the Taliban.

“[There's a tug of war between two different ways of running the country](#),” said Peter Semneby, Sweden's ambassador to Afghanistan. “It's the traditional patronage way of running Afghanistan against the modern way of running a country, with respect for the constitution, laws and transparency.”

By the time U.S. forces left Iraq, conflict and occupation had destroyed many of the patronage networks, creating new elites. In Afghanistan, the traditional political order remains entrenched after more than 13 years

of war, bolstered by American support, a weak central government and fears of a resurgent Taliban.

The ascent last year of President Ashraf Ghani, a U.S.-educated former World Bank official, was widely seen as a key step in altering old notions of power. But Noor and other strongmen are challenging his efforts to strengthen the government's authority. The U.S.-brokered power-sharing deal that ushered Ghani into his position "was a narrow victory for the modern way of running Afghanistan," Semneby said. "But the patronage system is striking back."

The mujahideen legacy

That system is visible across this sprawling provincial capital, the country's fourth-largest city, graced with ancient shrines and modern construction projects. Billboards looming over intersections show Noor with influential former mujahideen leaders from years past. The message is unmistakably clear: Noor is the heir to their legacy.

An ethnic Tajik, Noor gained prominence in late 2001 as the top mujahideen commander in northern Afghanistan fighting the Taliban regime. With American funds and weapons, the rebels ousted the Islamists, paving the way for Noor to control the nation's security forces in strategic Balkh province. In 2003, after a series of battles, he pushed out his main rival, Abdul Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek warlord, from its capital, Mazar-e Sharif. The next year, then-President Hamid Karzai made Noor provincial governor.

Under Karzai, the warlords thrived. The government either installed them in influential positions or left them alone. Many received funds from the United States and other Western powers to work alongside U.S. and NATO forces to fight the Taliban and al-Qaeda, further increasing their influence in Afghanistan's political circles.

Broad-shouldered with an athletic build, Noor was a high school teacher — hence his nickname — before he joined the U.S.-backed mujahideen resisting the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. He has since shaved his thick beard and traded his military uniform for tailored Western suits.

He has doled out parcels of land and jobs to hundreds of his former commanders and fighters, according to Western diplomats and human rights activists. Noor exerts influence over the media, judicial system and commercial life here. He's said to control lucrative customs revenue as well as dozens of companies, some of which receive Western-funded government contracts.

In late 2001 and early 2002, forces under Noor's command carried out a campaign of looting and rape against ethnic Pashtuns, whose tribesmen make up a majority of the Taliban, according to Human Rights Watch. Today, [Noor commands a network of militias](#), some of which have been implicated in numerous violations, including killings, beatings, abductions, extortion and land seizures.

"Because of the regular and ongoing nature of abuses, it is credible to allege that Atta is either aware of the

abuses and directly complicit, or he is indirectly culpable for failing to stop the abuses and hold perpetrators accountable,” said John Sifton, Human Rights Watch’s Asia Advocacy director.

A confidential 2011 security report by the U.S. and NATO-led coalition forces, obtained by The Washington Post, found that Noor sought to bolster his political position “by using his patronage network to assassinate and harass political opponents.” The report added that Noor’s “relationship with criminals, especially drug traffickers, has likely been profitable and contributed to [his] financial resources.”

Anyone who opposes him is a target, his critics say.

“Because of Atta’s power, I can no longer do my work freely,” said Shamsuddin Shams, 51, an ethnic Uzbek activist and former businessman who has openly criticized Noor. Noor, he said, confiscated his lands by force, threw him in prison several times and shut down a university he had launched.

Noor did not respond to repeated requests to be interviewed for this story. He has publicly denied allegations of abuses and corruption. In interviews, his friends and close associates insisted that he is so wealthy that he does not need to subsist on graft or violence.

“There’s no truth to what his enemies say about him,” said Zahir Wahdat, the deputy governor of the province and also a former mujahideen commander.

Noor’s supporters contend that he and other strongmen are Afghanistan’s true leaders and have sacrificed immensely for the nation. They disdain technocrats such as Ghani who spent much of their adult lives in the United States and Europe, returning only after the Taliban was ousted.

“Who has destroyed this country for the past 13 years? It’s the people who came from the West,” said Mowlana Farid, a close friend of Noor’s for three decades. “These people with Western ideas have given a bad name to the mujahideen, calling them warlords. Instead of disrespecting them, they have to be respected.”

Opponents of the president

At Balkh Gate, the main entrance to the city, police officers search cars for weapons. Travelers cannot enter unless they deposit their guns and pick them up on the way out. In no other province in Afghanistan does that happen. The policemen are supposed to report to the nation’s Interior Ministry. But it’s clear where their allegiance lies.

“If we had a committed person like Ustad Atta in every province, Afghanistan would be secure,” said Hamidullah Chamto, the police commander at the gate, which was emblazoned with another giant portrait of Noor.

Mazar-e Sharif is widely viewed as the safest city in the country, largely due to Noor’s intelligence, police and

military forces. In one recent incident, kidnappers snatched a 4-year-old boy, a relative of a well-known politician. Noor ordered that 5,000 photos of the child be distributed and closed all roads leading out of the city.

“The kidnappers released the child by the afternoon,” recalled Mohammad Moeen Marastial, the politician, who is a close Ghani ally. “Atta has people everywhere.”

That helps explain why Noor remains governor despite the allegations. In Noor, the United States and its allies see someone who can keep the north secure at a time when the Taliban are making inroads outside of their traditional power centers in the south and east.

But Noor and other strongmen have also emerged as the most powerful opposition to Ghani, even as the decades.

During last year's elections, Noor was a key supporter of Abdullah Abdullah, also a prominent former mujahideen figure. Noor publicly criticized Ghani and vowed to create a parallel government in the north if Ghani was elected. Ghani, in turn, vowed to tackle what he described as the illegal activities of Noor and other former warlords — and remove them from their influential positions.

[The power-sharing deal brokered by Secretary of State John F. Kerry](#), under which Abdullah became the country's chief executive, staved off potential chaos. But it boosted the influence of Noor and other strongmen aligned with Abdullah. Forced to make compromises, Ghani now leads an administration filled with former warlords, including Dostum, who is his vice president.

“If Ustad Atta doesn't himself want to be replaced, no one can replace him,” Wahdat said.

Unlikely to be removed

In January, members of parliament loyal to the old patronage system rejected more than half the ministers Ghani had appointed to his cabinet, which still is not fully functioning. Some Karzai loyalists and former mujahideen commanders have voiced displeasure with Ghani's attempts to enter peace talks with the Taliban. Ghani has also had a difficult time persuading Noor and other strongmen in charge of border areas to release vital customs revenue to the government.

“Ghani has a vision for a more unified country, and that runs up hard against Atta's sense of independence,” said Graeme Smith, Afghanistan analyst for the International Crisis Group.

Noor has aspirations to become leader of the ethnic Tajiks, potentially positioning himself for even greater influence, Western diplomats and analysts said. Even Ghani's closest friends say it is unlikely that he will fire Noor as governor in the near future. They are more worried that the Taliban or other militants will gain ground — or that other former warlords who have committed even graver abuses, such as Dostum, could seize control of

the north.

“The government has too many problems,” said Marastial. “If I was in Ghani’s position, for the stability of Afghanistan, it would be better if Atta stays in his position.”

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[New Afghan leaders face culture clash as they form Cabinet](#)

[Dostum, a former warlord who was once America’s man in Afghanistan, may be back](#)

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Sudarsan Raghavan has been The Post's Kabul bureau chief since 2014. He was previously based in Nairobi and Baghdad for the Post.

OPINION » COMMENT

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For a robust economy in Afghanistan

ASMA-KHAN LONE



AP

"Only 6 per cent of Afghanistan's land is cultivated; it could increase the yield to its full potential and help switch over from a predominantly opium-driven sector to alternative crop." Picture shows an Afghan farmer collecting raw opium in a poppy field in the Zhari district of Kandahar.

Located in the vicinity of rising economies China and India, Afghanistan has the leverage of benefitting in areas like investment, technical expertise and technology transfer

The overarching focus in Afghanistan on political stability and effectiveness of the security forces is understandable given the nature of the immediate challenges confronting the country. However, in the long run, economic stability will have to figure in as an intrinsic driver towards sustainable peace. While the previous dispensation was predominantly security-driven, President Ashraf Ghani, with his stint at World Bank and as Finance Minister previously, is expected to underscore economic reconstruction as a key component of state-building.

Beyond providing fiscal cushioning, target-oriented economic interventions can help bridge the governance gap and financial deficits — hallmarks of the previous regime, which, as offshoots of a poorly managed economic toolbox, contribute to a widening political and security vacuum. This vacuum, in turn, provides leeway for extremist forces to move in, as established by Sarah Chayes (Carnegie Endowment) in her comprehensive study drawing linkages between governmental corruption and religious extremism, especially in the context of Afghanistan.

Rebooting the economy

For a decade since 2002, Afghanistan witnessed an encouraging 9.5 per cent growth rate and single digit inflation, but it was widely sustained by the inflow of donor funds and developmental aid. With the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) drawdown drawing close, the growth rate began to dip in 2013 and reached 3.8 per cent by early 2015. With little indigenous infrastructure or capacity, Afghanistan is set to face a downward spiral, especially as donor funding is beginning to dry up. While the Strategic Partnership Agreement with the U.S. in 2012 provides it a stopgap retrieve (including financial support for another decade from 2015-2024), along with the trickling in of some donor pledges made during the 2012 Tokyo conference, Kabul will ultimately have to devise concrete plans to reboot its economy.

In fact, at the core of its structural weakness lies Afghanistan's overt reliance on foreign aid deftly manoeuvred during the Cold War when it played off both super powers to receive huge injections of aid.

At present, Afghanistan is banking on two factors to resuscitate its economy: its strategic location and its natural resources. Situated at the cusp of three regions — South Asia, the Persian Gulf, Central Asia and at the intersection of the East-West trade corridor — it hopes to channel its location as a hub of trade and transit activity by way of a land bridge between these diverse, yet immensely endowed, regions. In this regard, it plans to revive the ancient Silk Route. The U.S. has already drawn up plans for this opportunity in the form of its New Silk Road Initiative as has China with its proposed Silk Route Economic Belt.

Also on the anvil is the transportation of energy from the energy-rich Caspian region to energy-deficit South Asia through a network of pipelines, especially the TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India) pipeline and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-China pipeline. Another energy project, CASA-1000, envisages the transmission of hydroelectric power from Central Asia to South Asia via Afghanistan. Afghanistan and Pakistan also signed the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit and Trade Agreement in 2010 which is hoped to be pegged onto to the liberalisation of trade between Pakistan and India, allowing for a free movement of goods across the region. Located in the vicinity of rising economies China and India, Afghanistan also has the leverage of benefitting in areas such as investment, technical expertise and technology transfer.

The other element of Afghanistan's economic architecture is its natural resources. It has traditionally been rich in resources such as coal, chromite and marble and has been exporting gas to Russia since 1967. Though some studies undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s indicated the presence of vast mineral and hydrocarbon resources, it was not until 2010 that the U.S. announced the discovery of nearly \$1 trillion in untapped mineral deposits. The previously unknown deposits included huge veins of iron, copper, cobalt and gold, and critical industrial metals like lithium, so much so that Afghanistan was slated to become an important centre of global mining. It has already attracted considerable investment with China pledging \$2.8 billion for the development of the Aynak copper mines and a consortium of Indian companies in partnership with Canadian companies announcing to invest \$14.6 billion for the development of the iron ore mines in Hajigak. However, these investments, like those of the Silk Route land bridge, are presently at a standstill due to the precarious security scenario. The infrastructure for both plans is also missing and could take years to develop. In addition, the wealth of resources comes as a double-edged sword and could entail a vicious cycle of violence if not carefully handled. So, while grand in design and exhibiting huge promise, the enterprises are wrought with uncertainties and could take years to reach fruition.

Focussing on strengths

Meanwhile, Afghanistan could focus on its other strengths such as agriculture and livestock. Only 6 per cent of its land is cultivated; it could increase the yield to its full potential and help switch over from a predominantly opium-driven sector to alternative crops. This will address its issue of food insecurity. It could also harness its upper-riparian position and enter into water-sharing agreements with neighbours, especially with Iran and Pakistan. It could further build on its expanding service sector, undertake measures to plug corruption, and try bring its vast informal economy within the formal tax net. Scams such as the Kabul Bank fraud, one of the worst in international banking history, should be checked and an earnest effort to structurally reform the sector should be undertaken. Only by evolving a robust economy will it become a bulwark.

(Asma-Khan Lone is assistant professor at Jindal Global University.)

SEARCH

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GUANTÁNAMO PRISONERS ASK TO BE FREED BECAUSE OF END OF WAR IN AFGHANISTAN – OPE

APRIL 11, 2015 | ANDY WORTHINGTON | LEAVE A COMMENT

By [Andy Worthington](#)


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I wrote the following article for the “[Close Guantanamo](#)” website, which I established in January 2012 with US attorney Tom Wilner. [Please join us](#) – just an email address is required to be counted amongst those opposed to the ongoing existence of Guantanamo, and to receive updates of our activities by email.

On March 30, lawyers for [five Afghan prisoners](#) still held at Guantanamo [wrote a letter to President Obama](#) and other senior officials in the Obama administration asking for their clients to be released.

The five men in question are: Haji Hamdullah (aka Haji Hamidullah), ISN 1119; Mohammed Kamin, ISN 1045; Bostan Karim, ISN 975; Obaidullah, ISN 762; and Abdul Zahir, ISN 753.

The lawyers wrote, “Their continued detention is illegal because the hostilities in Afghanistan,

the only possible justification for detention, have ended. Therefore, these individuals should be released and repatriated or resettled immediately.” They referred to [President Obama’s State of the Union Address](#), on January 20 this year, at which the president said, “Tonight, for the first time since 9/11, our combat mission in Afghanistan is over.”

Under the heading, “The War in Afghanistan Is Over and Therefore Afghan Citizens Must Be Released,” the lawyers wrote, “The government’s authority to detain our clients is based on the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (‘AUMF’), passed by Congress and signed into law in the week following the attacks of September 11, 2001 ... The government’s authority to detain is not indefinite. Indeed, it lasts only as long as the war in Afghanistan exists.”

The lawyers then quoted Judge Sandra Day O’Connor’s opinion in *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, the 2004 Supreme Court ruling establishing that the AUMF authorized the imprisonment of the men held at Guantánamo. “It is a clearly established principle of the law of war that detention may last no longer than active hostilities,” Judge O’Connor wrote.

The lawyers added, “Over the last decade, the federal judiciary has acknowledged that the government’s authority to detain individuals at Guantánamo Bay will end eventually,” and quoted from a variety of US cases, in the D.C. Circuit Court, relating to the Guantánamo prisoners – including [Adham Ali Awad](#), a Yemeni prisoner, in 2010, when the appeals court judges stated, “[T]he United States’ authority to detain an enemy combatant is not dependent on whether an individual would pose a threat to the United States or its allies if released but rather upon the continuation of hostilities.”

As well as citing President Obama’s State of the Union Address, the lawyers also noted that, “on December 28, 2014, President Obama marked the end of Operation Enduring Freedom and combat operations in Afghanistan at a flag ceremony in Kabul, noting that ‘thanks to the extraordinary sacrifices of our men and women in uniform, our combat mission in Afghanistan is ending, and the longest war in American history is coming to a responsible conclusion.’ At that same ceremony, former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel further acknowledged the end of combat operations by American forces and the transfer of security authority to the government of Afghanistan: ‘At the end of this year, as our Afghan partners assume responsibility for the security of their country, the United States officially concludes Operation Enduring Freedom. Our combat mission in Afghanistan, which began in the aftermath of the September 11, 2011 attacks, will come to an end.’”

The lawyers also noted that the statements by President Obama and Chuck Hagel “are supported by concrete steps taken by American military forces, including the significant reduction of troops stationed in Afghanistan, the transfer of control over detention facilities housing Afghan detainees at Bagram Airfield to the Afghan government, and the transfer of security control of 95 Afghan districts to the Afghan government.”

They added, “Moreover, the Afghan government has requested on multiple occasions that its citizens detained in Guantánamo Bay be released. On December 22, 2014, the United States released four Afghan detainees from Guantánamo Bay and returned them to Afghanistan. Additionally, the United States has released hundreds of Afghan detainees being held at Bagram Airbase [and] the Afghan government has successfully overseen their return to civilian life. Accordingly, any concern that the release of our clients will result in their recruitment to an engagement in belligerent and militant actions against American forces is wholly unfounded. Our clients are not charged with any crime. Their detention is not penal in nature. Instead, they are being held captive subject to a military action that has concluded.”

They then — again — cited Justice O’Connor in *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*, drawing on a 1946 ruling: “Captivity is neither a punishment nor an act of vengeance ... A prisoner of war is no convict ... He is disarmed and from then on must be removed as completely as practicable from the front, treated humanely and in time exchanged, repatriated or otherwise released.”

In conclusion, the lawyers wrote, “In sum, we request that you take immediate action to release these five Afghan detainees. They have been detained without charge for over thirteen years. They have lived the last several years in isolation without any real hope that their detention will come to an end. The moral and legal deadline for their release passed long ago.”

The five men are amongst the 56 prisoners — out of **the remaining 122 prisoners** — who have not either been approved for release (56 others) or put forward for trials (the other ten). One of the five, Abdul Zahir, had been charged in the very first incarnation of the military commissions under President Bush, which the Supreme Court shut down in 2006. He has not been charged again in the years since although, as the *Miami Herald* noted, his name was “included in a list of **war crimes trial candidates** drawn up by the Department of Defense late last year that surfaced recently in legal documents.”

Two others — Mohammed Kamin and Obaidullah — were **charged in subsequent versions of the military commissions**, but the cases were ridiculously weak, and the cases are no longer active. In addition, **Obaidullah** and another of the five, **Bostan Karim**, had their habeas corpus petitions turned down after ideologically-motivated interference by the D.C. Circuit Court.

The other four men — none of whom are expected to face trials — are eligible for **Periodic Review Boards**, a process established in 2013 to review the cases of the men not cleared for release or facing trials. Unfortunately, the review process is disturbingly slow-moving. Just 13 reviews have taken place to date, and although eight men have been approved for release and two of the eight have been freed, there is no way of knowing how many years it might take for any of the other men — including the Afghans — to have their cases reviewed.

A Yemeni prisoner asks a court to order his release

The lawyers' letter about the Afghans followed a [federal court filing](#) submitted on behalf of a Yemeni prisoner, Mukhtar al-Warafi, at the end of February. Unlike the Afghans, al-Warafi, a medic in Afghanistan whose habeas corpus petition was [turned down in March 2010](#), was approved for release — if security concerns could be satisfied — by President Obama's high-level Guantánamo Review Task Force in January 2010, but, as the *Miami Herald* put it, he “is from violence-plagued Yemen, where the Obama administration won't send cleared captives.”

Al-Warafi's lawyers presented many of the same arguments the Afghans' lawyers put forward in their letter last week. As Shane Harris described it in an article for the [Daily Beast](#), al-Warafi is “saying that since President Obama has declared the war in Afghanistan is over, there are no longer any legal grounds to hold him.”

Harris stated that al-Warafi's court submission was “believed to be the first time a Guantánamo detainee has argued that the government's authority to detain him evaporated with end of military operations against the Taliban.” However, as he added, “when US attorneys respond, they could argue that, in fact, hostilities haven't come to a conclusion, and there are still grounds to hold the man. That could put them the strange position of undercutting the president, and arguing that just because the commander-in-chief says the war is over doesn't necessarily make it so.”

One of al-Warafi's lawyers is Brian Foster, who, with colleagues at the law firm Covington & Burling, represents prisoners accused of being involved with the Taliban as well as others accused of having some involvement with al-Qaeda. Foster said they “chose al-Warafi's case as a first test because he was only ever named as a member of the Taliban, offering a clearer argument for why he should be set free now,” as opposed to men accused of having al-Qaeda connections.

Arguments will no doubt be put forward that the conflict with al-Qaeda is ongoing, although as we at “Close Guantánamo” have always maintained, it should never be taken for granted that the US authorities' supposed evidence against the prisoners — including claims of their supposed involvement with al-Qaeda — is at all reliable, and in any case, as Brian Foster explained, although the legal argument for freeing men allegedly associated with al-Qaeda “is more complicated than for al-Warafi, which is why the team started with a client that had no al-Qaeda connections,” assumptions about al-Qaeda must also be challenged.

As Foster pointed out, the al-Qaeda to which low-level prisoners belonged “is not the same organization” as it was back in 2001. “It has nothing to do with the people who've been in Guantánamo for 13 years,” he said.

At “Close Guantánamo” we agree, and we can see no reason for any case to be made to attempt to justify the ongoing imprisonment of anyone at Guantánamo except for those who are facing trials. We urge appropriate action from President Obama, the Justice Department and the Pentagon, and hope to see further releases from Guantánamo in the very near future.



[Uruguay's President Mujica Confirms Offer Of New Home For Six Guantánamo Prisoners - OpEd](#)
In "1"



[Who Are Five Guantánamo Prisoners Given New Homes In Kazakhstan? - OpEd](#)
In "1"

[The 11-Year Old American Girl Who Knows More About Guantánamo Than Most US Lawmakers](#)

I'm posting below an essay about Guantánamo, written as a school project by Sammie Killmer, a sixth-grade schoolgirl in Denver, Colorado, who understands
In "Technology and Science"

Andy Worthington

Andy Worthington is the author of *The Guantánamo Files: The Stories of the 774 Detainees in America's Illegal Prison* (published by Pluto Press, distributed by Macmillan in the US, and available from Amazon – click on the following for the US and the UK). To receive new articles in your inbox, please subscribe to his RSS feed (he can also be found on Facebook and Twitter). Also see his definitive Guantánamo prisoner list, updated in January 2010, and, if you appreciate his work, feel free to make a donation.



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Russian intelligence warns of Islamic State's influence in Russia

12 APRILE 2015 BY ANDREA SPADA

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A senior Russian intelligence official warned of the potential influence of the Islamic State group in Russia, primarily among the Muslims in the North Caucasus provinces, wrote AP.

Russian federal forces have fought two separatist wars in Chechnya, which has become more so under the watch of Kremlin-backed strongman Ramzan Kadyrov. The Islamist insurgency, now dormant in Chechnya, has since spread to other North Caucasus provinces where bombings and killings of law enforcement officers have become almost a mundane occurrence.

Gen. Sergei Smirnov, deputy chief of the KGB's main successor agency, the Federal Security

was quoted by Russian wires as saying that the group is "beginning to infiltrate" terrorist orga focused on operating in the North Caucasus. Several warlords of the banned Imarat of Caucas have pledged allegiance to the IS, "a very dangerous trend," according to Smirnov.

An estimated 1,700 Russian nationals have joined the Islamic State group to fight in Syria and Smirnov said, adding that the actual figure is likely to be even higher.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's envoy to the North Caucasus said last month that at least militants who came back after fighting in Syria were killed in security sweeps last year. In a sp senior officials of the Federal Security Service, Putin said last month that one of its top priorit should be tracking Russian citizens who have left to fight alongside IS.

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Why the war in Ukraine is not a Cold War



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Article by: Nicole Gallina



About the Source

NICOLE GALLINA

Nicole Gallina is a central European politologist who publishes on Eastern European topics and political theoretical questions, and teaches regularly at Swiss and Eastern

The western world will soon witness a further escalation of Russia's crusade with the western world. The Ukrainian military and some NATO and US military experts have tried [to warn the West](#) and urged political and economic responses, such as freezing Russian assets (in line with the argument that there is "no military solution").

And responses are coming. But quite the other way round: Ukraine has to produce its own anti-tank missiles, as all it can get from the US-president are armored vehicles. The EU keeps silent on the "conflict" and on how to contain Russia, opening up the way for Greece that tries to [embrace Russia](#) in various forms, and leading German SPD-politicians (together with some of their Swiss counterparts), who are calling for a "normalization" of the relationship with Russia.

It looks like Ukraine reminds them of the situation in Prague 1968 and the "normalization" of the situation after Russian-backed troops crushed down the democratic movement in a Czechoslovakia that was occupied by Russia after the end of the Second World War, which, apparently, somehow justified the action.

There are three important differences between Russian interventions in eastern European countries during the Cold War and today's situation.

1. Ukraine reached its independence from Russia in 1991, and since then had the right to decide freely on its political and economic fate.

But Russia many times tried to provoke the breakdown of Ukraine as a sovereign and democratic state after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. It liquidated democratic

European
Universities.

DONATE

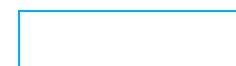
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political leaders who had a chance to become the country's new leaders, such as Ukraine's "Václav Havel" [Vyacheslav Chornovil](#) in 1999, and also tried to assassinate Viktor Yushchenko who was to become the country's president in 2004. It used political parties such as the Communist Party, and later the "Party of Regions" for its interests, infiltrated Ukrainian security forces, supported corrupted politicians, certain oligarchs and media with pro-Russian views, and also backed organized crime in the country – predominantly in the Donbas. At times, energy (gas) or military (the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea) blackmail was very useful. Those measures are called hybrid-war methods and include infiltration, disinformation, discreditation, obstruction, intimidation.

Those are probably the only things what Russia's elites are really productive at. On the contrary, concepts which are based on other premises such as international law and state sovereignty, Russia finds difficult to consider when states other than itself are concerned.

This is all not new. However, what is new and differs from the situation during the Cold War and also from the situation before March 2014 is that Russia has occupied vast territories of an independent European country.

It has used conventional warfare – in a scale only comparable to warfare during the Second World War – in order to occupy large parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts. It forced over a million of Ukrainian citizens to flee. Russia leveled at least a dozen of Ukrainian villages and cities in the Donbas, foremost [Vuhlehirsk](#) and [Debaltseve](#) in the Donetsk Oblast in February 2015, caring little about human losses which might go up to 5000 for the Vuhlehirsk/Debaltseve battles, consisting



mostly of Russian soldiers and volunteers, but also more than [500 civilians](#).

There was no case of large-scale conventional warfare between Russia and a sovereign European country during the Cold War.

2. Putin has a fan club in the West

A second important point that is contrary to the Cold War, we have what Ilarionov calls a [Putin-international](#) [find in this speech his arguments why this is not a Cold War].

During the Cold War it was clear that the enemy was the Soviet Union, and it had little friends in the western world. Today's western friends of the Russian president are many more, including western mass media, most "intellectuals," and mainstream political parties in Germany, Austria, France, Italy and others.

Disinformation and keywords – initially spread by the Russian side – have been eagerly adopted up by mainstream western politicians and media (also a difference to the Cold War) in order to avoid action. The word "conflict" will probably even survive in the case of a Russian occupation of the Baltic states.

The result is a "omertà," a code of silence, in western European societies:

not to mention the fact that Russia is using conventional warfare against Ukraine; is preparing Russian society for a large-scale war and exercising its troops on a permanent basis, has turned Kaliningrad, the Donbas and Crimea to Russian military fortresses.

This code of silence and the fact that no one wants to get involved has the result that there is no public discussion on the fact that Russia's objectives are much broader than Ukraine. Russia wants to split Europe from the United States, and to crash NATO. The non-existing discussion makes it almost impossible to get permanent NATO bases into the Baltic states or Poland. On a national EU scale, there are also few proposals and outcomes on how to counter Russia's destructive efforts: Lithuania has returned to military conscription and banned a Russian TV channel, Poland is putting up several watchtowers in order to observe its border with Kaliningrad (while there is no visible action vis-à-vis Russia's ally Belarus), some steps are made for a EU energy union.

International human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and others who could push a discussion on Russia's evil deeds care little about Ukrainian civilian losses, and even much less about the death of fighters on the Russian side (the latter would open the Pandora's box of Russian army involvement). The [OSCE](#), [UN](#), and other international bodies are helpless at best, and often used by Russia in order to push its interests.

3. The incapability or lack of desire to face the truth also prevents to tackle Europe's military weakness seriously

During the Cold War, the US army (and their European counterparts) had their material and troops ready in the case of an attack from the Soviet Union. Today [this is not the case](#). Europe and the US aren't ready to counter a conventional military attack from the Russian side. In the last months, Russia has been free to push the

borders for its military exercises in terms of European territory violated and amount of troops exercised. Russia even has turned to [nuclear blackmail](#). Few know that this has been a taboo-issue since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis which almost led to a nuclear war between the US and the Soviet Union.

The US and the EU have not responded to Russia's nuclear blackmail. At the same time, they claim deterrence functions.

However, deterrence means: if you are threatened with nuclear warheads, you also have to threaten with them. And threaten in such a way for the enemy to believe you.

This essentially is the problem. Russia does not believe the US and Europe are going to use their warheads. US and European leaders seem to know that. Therefore they even do not threaten with them.



Tags: [Cold War](#), [nuclear](#), [Putin](#), [Russia](#)

ISIS CLAIM RESPONSIBILITY FOR ATTACKING EMBASSIES IN LIBYA

The Moroccan and South Korean embassies were attacked in Tripoli.



[Islamic State \(http://ewn.co.za/Topic/Islamic-State\)](http://ewn.co.za/Topic/Islamic-State) [Islamic State militants \(http://ewn.co.za/Topic/Islamic-State-militants\)](http://ewn.co.za/Topic/Islamic-State-militants) [Isis \(http://ewn.co.za/Topic/Isis\)](http://ewn.co.za/Topic/Isis)
[Reuters \(http://ewn.co.za/Contributors/Reuters\)](http://ewn.co.za/Contributors/Reuters) | one hour ago (2015-04-13T05:44:30+0200)

TRIPOLI – A bomb exploded at the gate of the Moroccan embassy in the Libyan capital early on Monday, causing some damage but hurting nobody, a security official said, only hours after gunmen attacked South Korea's mission in Tripoli.

Militants claiming loyalty to Islamic State said on twitter they were responsible for both attacks, the latest strikes against foreigners, embassies or oilfields in Libya. It was not possible to verify the authenticity of the claims.

Islamic State militants have exploited chaos in the North African country where two governments allied to a host of armed groups fight for control four years after the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi.

The bomb damaged the gate and a residential building next to the Moroccan embassy located in the up market Ben Ashour district, a security official and Reuters reporter at the scene said.

Nobody was hurt by the blast early on Monday, the official said.

On Sunday, gunmen fired shots at the South Korean embassy in Tripoli killing two local security guards and wounding a third person, South Korean and Libyan officials said.

A South Korean foreign ministry official in Seoul said there were no Korean casualties, adding that the embassy was staffed by two Foreign Service officials and one administrative staff member. He said the government was considering relocating, but did not elaborate.

Libyan militants professing loyalty to Islamic State have claimed several high-profile attacks on foreigners in Libya this year, including an assault on the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli and the beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians.

They have also claimed several assaults on embassies such as those of Egypt and Algeria in Tripoli, attacking mostly empty buildings as most countries have pulled out diplomatic staff because of the security situation.

Libya's internationally recognised government has been based in the east since a rival faction called Libya Dawn seized Tripoli in August, setting up a rival administration.

WorldViews

I've seen the Taliban's brutality in Afghanistan. Boko Haram might be worse.

By **Kevin Sieff** April 12 at 12:42 PM

GWOZA, Nigeria — Flying into northeastern Nigeria, I thought about southeastern Afghanistan.

I was in an MI-24 helicopter last week traveling with the Nigerian army toward Boko Haram's former headquarters, trying to imagine what the insurgents had left behind after they were forced to flee in the face of a major military operation.

[Related: [War-torn Nigerian town shows devastating legacy of Boko Haram](#)]

One of the complications of covering insurgencies is that you can typically visit the militants' strongholds only once they've left. And so we assess what we can based on what those groups have left behind. It's not a comprehensive indicator, but it's a glimpse into the way militants use their power.

In 2½ years as a Post correspondent in Afghanistan, I often found myself in Taliban strongholds newly vacated by the insurgents. Many of them were pockmarked by bomb blasts and cratered by airstrikes, full of residential structures that had been turned into munitions depots.

But there were always signs that the Taliban was there to do more than fight. In the Tangi Valley, I once embedded with the Afghan army on a mission into a well-known insurgent haven. The road had been mined to keep intruders out, but the valley itself showed few signs of destruction by the Islamist extremists — it was a stunningly pristine landscape of well-irrigated farmland, neat wooden bridges over a mountain stream, a functioning clinic.

On another trip with the U.S. military into a small Taliban-run village in Paktika province, we saw an active bazaar and government-operated schools. None of this detracts from the horrors of the Taliban: the senseless killings, the abuse of women, the attacks on helpless civilians. But I was reminded of these details — the Taliban's attempts at bringing about order — as our helicopter descended last week upon Gwoza, the capital of Boko Haram's self-proclaimed Islamic caliphate.

The scene was post-apocalyptic, an entire city destroyed. Almost every building, it seemed, had been ransacked or set on fire. Schools were in ruin. Bodies decayed in a pile. Gwoza felt orderless and uninhabitable.

It was impossible to know whether all the destruction was due to Boko Haram; the military had been conducting

airstrikes in northeastern Nigeria, and it engaged in a fierce firefight with the militants to drive them from their stronghold. Nigerian soldiers certainly had committed abuses in the past. But residents blamed the insurgents for much of the damage. The burning and looting corresponded to reports of the insurgents' behavior in other areas.

In videos and statements, Boko Haram, like the Taliban, has presented itself as a religious alternative to a dysfunctional, irreligious government. But it has made no attempt to govern. Unlike the Taliban, it has won no public confidence.

As we sped through the devastation of Gwoza in a military convoy, this fact seemed to me a reason to be hopeful. Defeating the Taliban means conducting a nuanced counterinsurgency campaign — clobbering the appeal of the insurgents as much as their ability to fight. In religious and insular parts of the country, that can be a near-impossible prospect.

[A Nigerian soldier walks by a secondary school destroyed by Boko Haram. This is in the insurgent group's former stronghold -- just retaken by Nigerian forces. The entire city has been demolished. (Kevin Sieff/The Washington Post)]

In Gwoza, no one seemed to long for the days of Boko Haram. When people who had been displaced began to return, they told of unspeakable horrors — their husbands killed, their wives raped, their children gunned down.

I thought of the relics of a Taliban court I once saw — a symbol of an archaic and inhumane system of justice, but nonetheless evidence of an attempt to govern. Gwoza appeared to have had nothing like this.

Walking through the ruins here, there was an aspect of the destruction that felt almost meticulous. There are thousands of homes in Gwoza, and insurgents appeared to have been intent on marking or destroying each of them. For now, trying to document those acts, the speed or breadth of the violence, is an act of imagination.

We know little more about the specifics of Boko Haram's reign than we do about Gwoza's future.

And what of its future? In Afghanistan, when I left a town from where the Taliban had been pushed out, it was typically only a matter of time before the insurgents returned. The fighters were from those villages, and it seemed that they would always have some support there, particularly if the Afghan government didn't develop a permanent and robust presence.

In Gwoza, victory should be easier, but the fight ahead is still a massive one. I passed groups of Nigerian troops sitting in their makeshift posts, seeking shade in the scorching heat. None of the Boko Haram checkpoints had been cleared away. Even as civilians came back, there seemed to be no plan to house them.

One senior commander said he hoped "organizations" would come to assist the returning residents, referring to aid groups and the United Nations. But for the foreseeable future, the problem was theirs alone.

Related coverage:

[War-torn Nigerian town shows devastating legacy of Boko Haram](#)

[Children rescued from Boko Haram are so traumatized they forgot their names](#)

[South African mercenaries join Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram.](#)

Kevin Sieff has been The Post's bureau chief in Nairobi since 2014. He served previously as the bureau chief in Kabul and had covered the U.S. -Mexico border.

Beyond The Nuclear Deal: A Civil War In The Middle East?

By Gulam Asgar MITHA (Canada)

“There are 40,000,000 men under arms in the world today, and our statesmen and diplomats have the temerity to say that war is not in the making. Hell’s bells! Are these 40,000,000 men being trained to be dancers?”—Smedley Butler (Major General, an outspoken critic of U.S. military adventurism and, at the time of his death in 1940 the most decorated Marine in U.S. history). The world military manpower has increased substantially in 75 years.

The two US political parties hiding under the garbs of “democracy” are both right wingers (conservatives, liberals, neocons, fascists, capitalists etc.) pursuing the same geopolitical agenda in the Middle East. On one hand the GOP (Republicans) are pursuing a belligerent agenda while the Democrats are pursuing a diplomatic agenda. **The goal for both parties is exactly the same, that being global hegemony and survival as an empire. They share the ideology with their right wing partners in Britain, France, Germany (EU3), Canada and Israel and all are beating on the war drums while at the same time working hypocritically for peace.**

N. America and Europe remain unchallenged externally through NATO military alliance and economically by liberal capitalism ([PITFALLS OF LIBERAL CAPITALISM](#)) Russia and China rank number 2 and 3, respectively, as military powers after the US while China is on an equal footing with the US as an economic power. Russia has been militarily contained in Ukraine and perceptibly weakened by western sanctions. **Both are perceived as Eurasian threats towards achieving global hegemony. The west does not have the stomach to engineer a conflict in Eurasia so the killing fields will be in the Middle East.** The methods by the right wingers are different but the result has always been identical whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Gaza, Libya or Syria. Now they intend to pit Iran and it’s so called Shia allies with Sino-Russian support and Saudi Arabia with its Sunni allies supported by the NATO alliance through a disastrous conflict in the Middle East—a Muslim civil war in the region.

Learning from the pages of history, the Battle of Jamal (camel) took place at [Basra, Iraq](#) in November 656 AD. [Aisha](#), a wife of Prophet Mohammed and daughter of the first Muslim caliph Abu Bakr, heard about the killing of [Uthman](#), the third [Caliph](#). Angered by his unavenged death, and the naming of Ali as the fourth caliph she took up arms against those supporting Ali. She gained support of the big city of Basra and, for the first time, Muslims took up arms against each other. This battle is now known as the [first](#) Muslim civil war. The battle was politically (tribal) motivated regarding the issue of caliphate succession after Uthman’s assassination. Some miscreants used Aisha to gain power but lost out. This battle had nothing to do with Shias and Sunnis as neither existed then but one entirely of pre-Islamic practices of tribal avenging. After the battle, Aisha’s brother [Muhammad](#), who was Ali’s commander and his adopted son, approached his sister for reconciliation. It was accepted. These pre-Islamic tribal practices of vengeance continue on even in these modern times in the Gulf monarchies of Arabia.

The signs of another great Muslim civil war are becoming visible on the region’s horizons. Though perceptibly it is about the Shia-Sunni conflicts, the fact is that the sectarian issues are being exploited together with the geopolitics of the region. The Gulf monarchies and Israel feared that the Iranians were acquiring a nuclear bomb to threaten them. Will both be pacified by the N-deal and convinced that Iran is no longer a regional nuclear threat to Israel as a state and to the Gulf monarchies as religious extremists? Thus far it does not seem so.

It may seem, in all aspects, that the P5+1 N-deal with Iran is with the objective of achieving peace in the

region. It is an illusion. Iran understands that but it has accepted the deal to maneuver out of the sanctions and what have USA and EU3 powers gained by the easing of the sanctions? US, Israel and EU3 are also no fools hiding behind the illusion of peace when the agenda is war-one not of their making but that of the “bloodthirsty Muslims”. Both aspects will be examined without delving into details in the following paragraphs.

Iran achieved the 20% enrichment of uranium as a bargaining chip – not that it ever wanted a bomb.

Once it had achieved that leverage Iranian President Rouhani made peaceful overtures

towards negotiations so that sanctions against it would be lifted and accrue economic benefits from the lifting of sanctions on banking and financial sectors and export of oil and gas imposed under UNSC. In exchange Iran surrendered various facets of its N-program.

Due to the sanctions Iran’s crude oil exports had fallen from 2.2 million barrels per day (MMBOPD) in 2011 to 700,000 MMBOPD by 2013-14 costing Iran \$50-55 billion/year (It is anticipated that additional 300,000 BOPD will come on the market in early 2016). The Iranian currency also fell against the US dollar by 60% causing inflation to rise by 35-40%. By early 2013 Iran’s economy was seriously being pinched by the economic sanctions. Iran’s ulterior motive was its right under the NPT to acquire nuclear technology for scientific research and fuel and it has managed to achieve the desired results by being able to operating about 5,060 centrifuges to produce 3.67% LEU (low enriched uranium) while at the same time stabilizing its economy. All along Iran was supported by China and Russia, its principal arms suppliers.

As Michael Rubin, an Iran analyst and critic of the administration at the American Enterprise Institute (supported by the neo-cons under Bush dynasty) correctly stated: *“The Iranians used to brag that they play chess and we play checkers. It turns out that they play chess, while we play solitaire.”* Not quite.

The US has portrayed itself as a global peace broker by the deal with Iran but on the other side it continues to support the Gulf monarchies and the 10 member Sunni coalition to adopt belligerence in Syria and Yemen. Large corporations operate the cogs of the American economy and thrive during periods of recessions and wars. Both right wing parties are just puppets of the big corporations. The US recognized that without the lifting of sanctions under the N-deal, Iran would’ve been unable to fund and sustain its position as the regional power and support Iraq, Syria and Lebanon making up the Shia crescent. The US also needed to get an inside view of Iran’s military capability and most likely

it will manage it even though Iran took off the table the issue of PMD (possible military dimensions). If it’d not have done so, the same WMD issue with Iraq would’ve been imposed on the country. If Iran, by some scheme of the west, is to get involved in the Muslim civil war, it would need the monetary clout. The US and EU3 have ensured this by lifting the sanctions in phases.

Since the Western powers were kicked out of Indo-China, they along with Israel have managed to create wars, civil wars and wars of terrorism in Muslim countries over the past four decades – in Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Mali, Libya, Yemen and Iran. *These wars have killed at*



least 15 million Muslims in those four decades. In sharp contrast, Southeast Asia has seen peace and economic prosperity. If Muslims desire peace and economic prosperity, they'll have to adopt the SE Asian model. In a civil war, it will be Muslims eating the flesh and drinking the blood of each other. Some sense should prevail among Muslims by not falling into the western trap. Will it? Time will tell if the western powers will be able to impose their civil war agenda in the Middle East or will Muslims get their sanity to defeat the western agenda and opt for peace?

Gulam Asgar Mitha is a retired Technical Safety Engineer. He has worked with several N. American and International oil and gas companies. He has worked in Libya, Qatar, Pakistan, France, Yemen and UAE. Currently Gulam lives in Calgary, Canada and enjoys reading and keeping in tune with current global political issues.