



Select Committee on International Relations and Defence

Corrected oral evidence: The UK and Afghanistan

Monday 28 September 2020

4 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Anelay of St Johns (The Chair); Lord Alton of Liverpool; Baroness Blackstone; Baroness Fall; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Helic; Lord Purvis of Tweed; Baroness Rawlings; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Baroness Smith of Newham.

Evidence Session No. 6

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 47 - 54

Witnesses

I: Husain Haqqani, Director for South and Central Asia, Hudson Institute; Dr Ayesha Siddiq, Research Associate, South Asia Institute, SOAS.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Husain Haqqani and Dr Ayesha Siddiqi.

Q47 **The Chair:** I welcome Husain Haqqani, Director for South and Central Asia at the Hudson Institute, and Dr Ayesha Siddiqi, Research Associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies, South Asia Institute. Thank you both for joining us this afternoon to share your expertise as we continue to take public evidence in our inquiry into the UK and Afghanistan.

I remind Members and witnesses that this session is on the record; it is transcribed and broadcast.

I repeat my reminder to Members to declare any relevant interests when they ask their questions.

I will start by asking the first rather general question, and then I shall turn to my colleagues for more detailed questions. If at the end of this session there is time, I will invite colleagues to put supplementaries. As I did in the previous session, I shall ensure that those who do not have the opportunity to ask a question on the formal list are given priority.

In your view, what are the key features and motivations of Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan?

Husain Haqqani: Let me begin by saying that at partition in 1947 Pakistan inherited 19% of British India's population and 17% of its revenues, but one-third of its army. Unlike most countries that raise an army to meet the threats they face, Pakistan has had to look for threats that match the size of its army.

Pakistan's security policies have been based on the notion that India plans to undo partition. An alliance between India and Afghanistan is seen as a threat to Pakistan's existence, as it would create a pincer from Pakistan's east and north-west.

Indian and Afghan assurances that they do not intend to move militarily against Pakistan, and Afghanistan's political support of Pakistan during its wars with India, have failed to change the core Pakistani perspective that goes all the way back to the country's inception. Pakistan's desire to install a pro-Pakistan regime in Kabul has led to its support of Islamist radicals, including the Taliban, since the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, and it can be argued that Pakistan's motive in supporting the anti-Soviet jihad between 1979 and 1988 was not limited to defeating the Soviets but was motivated by its desire for a government in Kabul that Islamabad could control.

The late military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq stated clearly in 1988 that Pakistan's support of the anti-Soviet jihad had earned—these are the exact words—"Pakistan the right to determine who would govern Afghanistan and how".

In a nutshell, Pakistan's motivation in supporting the most obscurantist Afghan group since the Soviet withdrawal is: to diminish Pashtun nationalism on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line, replacing it with Islamism in Afghanistan; to ensure that India's presence in Afghanistan, even political or cultural, is minimal; to install a government in Afghanistan who are completely beholden to and dominated by Pakistan; and to create what Pakistan's former army chief, General Aslam Beg, described as a "fusion of Afghanistan and Pakistan", which would be on Pakistan's terms.

Dr Ayesha Siddiqa: History is one of the major drivers of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. I completely agree with Mr Husain Haqqani's assessment of Pakistan's strong military, but it also meant that Pakistan looked at its neighbourhood in terms of securing its territory.

From very early on, historically, the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has never been a pleasant pathway. Afghanistan was one of the first neighbours that did not immediately recognise Pakistan when it was formed in 1947. It voted against Pakistan in the UN.

What Pakistan wants at this point in time is, first, a secure border with Afghanistan. Secondly, it has always looked at Afghanistan through the lens of Afghanistan's relations with India, so one of the primary factors that drives Pakistan's policy is India. It does not want India to operate in Afghanistan. That is a complete no-no and is a major driver.

That is followed by some more clear-cut territorial bifurcations. This is a reference to the Durand Line. The Durand Line is a frontier, not a boundary; it is not recognised in the same way as an ordinary international boundary. What Pakistan has realised over the years is that, be it the Taliban or any other political entity in Afghanistan, there is nervousness in accepting and negotiating the Durand Line.

From Pakistan's perspective, it is also a very difficult and problematic issue. What Pakistan has done in the past five, six or 10 years is to build a fence and unilaterally develop the concept of an international boundary. It wants a government in Kabul who accept that fence as the international boundary between the two countries, and that would certainly give it a sense of security.

The third driving force is the Pashtun and similar tribes who live across the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, which in the past has led to a Pashtunistan nationalist movement. There are linkages across the border, and one of Pakistan's motivations is to discourage a nationalist movement that overrides Pakistani nationalism. That is one of the concerns.

Finally, a positive motivation and expectation of Pakistan, especially after 1989 and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, is to increase its footprint in central Asia. It wants to be a dominant player via Afghanistan. Very recently, Mohammad Sadiq Khan, the Afghanistan Special Envoy of Pakistan's Prime Minister, gave an interview in which he

mentioned that one of the attractions for Pakistan was an increase in its footprint in central Asia.

Those are the strategic motivations. One reason that I would call tactical relates to Pakistan's current situation as part of the Financial Action Task Force. Pakistan believes that, if it manages to be central to a peace deal between the Americans and a future Afghan government, or the Taliban in Afghanistan, it may lead to concessions from the United States, and Pakistan could then manage to find itself out of the grey list and into the white list.

Q48 Lord Reid of Cardowan: I thank the witnesses for that fascinating and perhaps a little disturbing analysis of the relationship, features and motivations behind Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan.

Perhaps our witnesses could say a little more about their assessment of the involvement of other regional actors in Afghanistan, in particular India, which has been touched on, the Gulf states, China and Russia.

Husain Haqqani: India sees Afghanistan as a neighbour with whom its connectivity has been disrupted by the emergence of Pakistan. The way it looks at it is that it had centuries of a relationship with Afghanistan and only a disruption over the past 73 years. India has maintained close ties with all Afghan governments, except the Taliban during its rule between 1994 and 1999.

India is a major donor of aid to Afghanistan; it has extensive cultural and educational relations. Most of Afghanistan's elite have been educated in India at high school or college level, and many Afghans see it as a guarantor of Afghanistan's sovereignty against possible dominance by Pakistan. Pakistani authorities suspect that India uses Afghan territory (and its embassy and consulates) to support Pashtun and Baluch irredentism.

The Chair: We are having difficulty with the sound.

Husain Haqqani: The Gulf states maintain economic and cultural ties with Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia was a major financier of the mujaheddin during the 1980s. Since 1992 and until very recently Saudi Arabia and the UAE tied their policy with that of Pakistan. They were formerly countries that recognised the Taliban government before 9/11, but they have changed in recent months rather than years and softened their position in complete support of Pakistan, partly because Qatar has become a major player. It has hosted Taliban leaders for several years and many of them have now moved their families from Pakistan to Qatar, and it wants to act as the facilitator of the end-of-conflict settlement.

China hopes to emerge as the major power in Afghanistan and central Asia, especially if Pakistan emerges dominant in Afghanistan. Pakistan is already a key Chinese ally and China would like to expand the China-Pakistan economic corridor to Afghanistan and beyond into central Asia, especially Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. That would ensure China and Pakistan controlled the connectivity of Afghanistan and its

central Asian neighbours to the rest of the world. Two ports in Pakistan, Karachi and Gwadar, are expected to be pivotal in that strategy of being the dominant nation in central and south-west Asia.

Of course, Russia had a historic connection with Afghanistan from the Soviet era. It occupied Afghanistan and supported a government there until 1992. Then it felt it had been marginalised in the power play in Afghanistan. It would like to have some role in it again, and from the point of view of Mr Vladimir Putin nothing would be better than giving the Americans a bloody nose just like the Russians got in the 1980s.

Dr Ayesha Siddiq: I would make a list of countries in terms of their significance to Afghanistan. Of course, the top international players are the United States and the European Union, and then there are regional states. The regional states are not necessarily all of Afghanistan's neighbouring states, but I would put in that order Pakistan, India and Iran. A third list has in it Russia, China and the Gulf states.

I am not going to talk about the US and the European Union, but India has a significant role and footprint. The problem is that all these regional states are working at cross-purposes from each other. Iran is concerned, especially against the backdrop of the ongoing Middle East process—the UAE-Israel deal, et cetera—with America putting greater pressure on Iran, so it wants to build up a neighbourhood and linkages that can sustain its power in the medium to long term.

For example, what Iran wants in Afghanistan is managed stability. It has links with the Taliban, including the Haqqani network. It has not burned its boats; it has not limited itself to the Northern Alliance, which it did during the 1990s. It is expanding, but it does not necessarily mean that ideologically in the long term it would be invested in that kind of relationship. It would perhaps want managed stability in Afghanistan.

India has a very different role because of its relationship with Pakistan. For a long time it was believed that peace in Afghanistan was dependent upon peace between India and Pakistan in Kashmir. This was definitely the situation for the past five or six years, especially until the end of the last Nawaz Sharif government in Pakistan in 2018.

In order to have peace generally in Afghanistan and a situation where India and Pakistan are not at each other's throats, which continues to be a possibility, leaving aside India's reasons for investing in the future in Afghanistan, it is adamant about having a footprint in Afghanistan. There are even thoughts of India now wanting to begin talks with the Taliban. It has over 400 development projects. Pakistan finds that extremely irksome, and its entire Taliban policy in some ways is based on the perspective of how to counter that and push India back from Afghanistan.

The Gulf states, China and Russia have a reduced role at this juncture. For the past five to six years Pakistan has posited itself to Russia and China as a country that will deliver Afghanistan from the United States. There is much conversation in Islamabad about a possible China-Russia-

Pakistan coalition or alignment of sorts to ensure that the United States leaves Afghanistan.

Q49 **Baroness Rawlings:** In this unstable world, what is your opinion on the most likely outcome of the peace talks? What would happen if, sadly, the talks broke down, especially regarding the US and NATO approach?

Husain Haqqani: I for one am not very optimistic about the outcome of the talks. It is incorrect to define them as peace talks; they are primarily withdrawal talks. The United States has made all the major concessions up front. The Taliban knows that the US is eager to withdraw from Afghanistan. As it sees it, it is just negotiating the withdrawal of foreign forces for the restoration of the *status quo ante* when it ruled Afghanistan as an Islamic emirate.

The Taliban has repeatedly said that it has only two clear-cut objectives in the talks. The first is to ensure an orderly US withdrawal; the second is the establishment of an Islamic government. For the Taliban, their emirate is the right form of Islamic government.

The design of the talks has been similar to that of the Paris peace talks at the end of the war in Vietnam, with one major difference. At that time both North and South Vietnam were party to the talks. This time, the Afghanistan government were not part of the talks that the US had with the Taliban, nor is Pakistan formally a partner in the ongoing talks. At that time in Vietnam Henry Kissinger said he wanted a decent interval between US withdrawal and the collapse of the US-backed government of South Vietnam. It seems that this time the American negotiator, Mr Khalilzad, is looking only for a decent interval because he has not put his weight behind getting the Taliban to concede anything, including a ceasefire.

The United States generally does not lose wars; it only loses interest. Afghanistan is a poor backwater from America's point of view that becomes strategically significant only when a hostile power controls it. The United States supported Afghanistan in its holy war against the Soviets during the 1980s but walked away after the Soviet withdrawal and returned only after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The view here in Washington, where I live, seems to be that America now has the capability to monitor any potential future attacks on American soil and does not need to engage at the same level of military or counterterrorist activity on Afghanistan's soil as it did after 9/11. That is the real motivation of the talks, and that is not really going to result in a significant outcome that brings stability and peace to Afghanistan.

An important fact that has been ignored in these talks is that America's Afghan allies have borne the vast bulk of the human cost of fighting in that country. More than 28,000 Afghan security personnel have been killed in the fighting since 2015 alone. By contrast, American fatalities are low. In 2015 only 10 American troops lost their lives; nine were killed in 2016; 11 were killed in 2017; and, in 2018, 12 American soldiers lost

their lives. Therefore, the Americans can reduce their troops gradually to create the circumstances for peace.

President Trump has made it clear that he wants to withdraw regardless of the consequences. If that happens, I expect a Pakistan-backed Taliban march on Kabul as the most likely outcome. It is unlikely that the people of Afghanistan will accept the return of the Taliban to power because, contrary to its assertions, I do not think it has much room for changing its outlook on the world. Its ideology is still the same. Its tactics might change, but its basic attitude towards others will not, so that would lead to a civil war in which the present government in Afghanistan looked for allies while the Taliban continued to depend on Pakistan, which has supported it since its inception.

Dr Ayesha Siddiq: I think there is an understanding, even in Pakistan, that you need to have Americans in the room to get an outcome. I do not believe that Pakistan wants a complete takeover by the Taliban. That does not serve Pakistan's interests at the moment.

During the mid-1990s, when the Taliban controlled more than 75% of Afghan territory, Pakistan realised that it was difficult to dominate the Taliban. It would listen but then not listen to Pakistan. Pakistan's Prime Minister, Imran Khan, has just published an article in the *Washington Post* in which he argues that Americans should not leave in a hurry.

What it means is that it is a long process. I think all regional actors, even Afghan actors, realise that, if there are to be any talks, be they withdrawal talks, peace talks or intra-Afghan talks, it is a long process, but for that long process to succeed there has to be the presence in the room of a third arbiter—the United States of America, backed by NATO.

There have been adjustments. My understanding is that there have been adjustments in Afghanistan in how it thinks. For example, in Doha during the talks you could see Afghan Taliban talking to women and engaging with them. The Taliban leadership understands that it cannot go back to the kind of Islamic system that it introduced in the mid-1990s. However, the Taliban definitely wants an Islamic system. For example, it has insisted upon a religious council of elders to select the ruling leaders. It has insisted during this round of talks on introducing a Hanafi form of government—a Sunni government that would be close to, for example, a Shia Iran and would minimise the role of the Northern Alliance or mostly religious minorities in Afghanistan. That is definitely the framework. Where will they—

The Chair: We have had a break in the audio.

Dr Ayesha Siddiq: Just to finish, on instability, if the Americans are still in the room and talks fail or do not take off, you will still have a level of violence, but it may not increase extensively. If the Americans are out of the room, violence will definitely increase. In that case, if talks break down, Pakistan will support the Taliban instead of the Kabul government.

Q50 **Baroness Fall:** Part of my question has already been covered, but I want to explore in a bit more detail Pakistan's approach to the peace negotiations. You have talked about it not being formally involved, but I wonder whether there is any informal involvement. Looking again at the outcome you think it is looking for, does it see an Islamic state developing next to it, and is that something it wants?

Husain Haqqani: Pakistan has facilitated the talks between US negotiators and Taliban leaders. The irony is that these are the Taliban leaders Pakistan said for years it knew nothing about. All of a sudden, they have appeared in Pakistan and from there they have been brought to Doha for the negotiations.

Pakistan would like the US to withdraw from Afghanistan. It was the US intervention that interrupted Pakistan's more or less effective control of Afghanistan, because the Taliban really had nobody else to turn to during the 1990s. Pakistan would again like the Taliban, as its protégé, to have a major share in post-withdrawal government.

There is definitely a disagreement between experts and Pakistani officials about what that would mean. I do not think the Taliban is amenable to sharing power. It has a very specific world view, which it keeps reiterating. In any case, if you want Afghanistan to be run as it was run in the eighth century and somebody else wants to bring it into the 21st century, how do you find a middle ground? It is a totalitarian movement and, therefore, it will eventually demand what it believes in.

Pakistan ended its support of the Taliban government only when it felt that the United States might threaten it after 9/11. It does not see it as the kind of problem that many of us see. I am a Pakistani and I see it as a problem for Pakistan. The Taliban could inspire a movement inside Pakistan that could be very extremist in its interpretation of Islam, but that is not how Pakistan's elite sees it. It sees it as a victory. Pakistan's main media are already celebrating the impending victory of the Taliban.

Pakistan's tendency to say one thing and do another is still very visible. There is a public position—"We want the talks to lead to a power-sharing arrangement"—but privately I think Pakistan really wants Taliban dominance and success. That is the outcome it seeks as long as it takes place in a context in which Pakistan does not earn the wrath of major powers such as the United States.

Dr Ayesha Siddiqi: What Pakistan wants in Afghanistan is managed peace. Managed peace can happen only with an American presence, thus the sudden insistence that America should not leave immediately. Pakistan is internal to Afghan dynamics and also external.

I do not believe that Pakistan wants dominance by the Taliban at this stage. It wants a sizeable representation of the Taliban. The Pakistan military believes that the Taliban represents the Pashtun population, so it wants that representation—there should be enough Taliban but not the kinds of numbers that would disrupt the relationship with Pakistan.

I repeat that what Pakistan experienced during the 1990s was that beyond a point the Taliban would not listen. Therefore, a constitutional order in which the Taliban is adjusted to the new civil society that has emerged in Afghanistan is what suits Pakistan's interests.

What Pakistan does not want in the short term is the current Kabul Administration. Most actors, although Pakistan supports Abdullah Abdullah, do not want Ashraf Ghani or the entire Administration. What they want perhaps is an interim government in which there is the Taliban and a second tier of the current government—for example, one ambassador in Pakistan, who would serve for three years. Omar Zakhilwal and such bureaucrats have recently been going around negotiating and building political clout. That is one of the names that come to mind, but it is definitely a second-tier leadership in the current government.

What Pakistan wants is exactly what it demanded when the Soviet troops were getting out of Afghanistan: an interim arrangement that ensures a government in Kabul who are friendly to Pakistan. I would insist that it wants the Taliban, but not its full control, which would disempower Pakistan rather than empower it.

- Q51 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Thank you for some very enlightening, if somewhat depressing, testimony. As I understand it, neither of you thinks that there is a very high chance of there being an agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban—that is certainly Ambassador Haqqani's view. Can we take it as a working assumption that some sort of deal is struck? Do you think that the neighbours, who, as you have quite rightly said, have been meddling in Afghanistan for hundreds of years, would see a commitment and a motivation to support and uphold such a deal? Would that commitment and support be forthcoming, in your view? Could it be anchored in international law somehow by the way in which the settlement was received by the UN and the international community?

Perhaps you could speculate a little on that, leaving on one side for the moment what we all think about the likelihood of there being a deal.

Dr Ayesha Siddiq: We talk a lot about law and agreement, but at the end of the day it is about realpolitik. It is about how different states assess their interests. If the peace negotiations end up with an agreement in which both sides are equally represented and neighbouring states manage to anchor their interests among those players, there will be a commitment for that peace deal to move on.

Right now, one of the biggest challenges for a peace deal, which we do not talk about sufficiently, is the divergent understanding of the outcome. There is divergence between India and Pakistan. India will certainly want to continue to have a foothold in Afghanistan. Pakistan, on the other hand, wants there to be Taliban representation in the government, which helps it to push India out. If there is a stalemate at the time of a peace agreement, and both sides—or even Iran—feel that they are not really

invested, I see a lot of negativity there. I do not see any positive outcomes.

On the sidelines, it is important to encourage those countries also to have talks, in which they can thrash out some of the differences. Historically, by which I mean in the past five to 10 years, the understanding in Islamabad has been that there is no way India can come into the region. From Pakistan's perspective, India invests in insurgencies in Pakistan and destabilises Pakistan. Therefore, it should not be present there. That has stopped the Kabul Administration seeking any military help, training, et cetera. Although the Ashraf Ghani government did seek help from India, it also turned to Islamabad for greater help. The government understand that the cost of reaching out to India is far greater.

At some juncture, these regional states have to build an understanding of where they will draw a line—of where the threshold will be as far as Afghanistan is concerned. Will Pakistan allow India to play a development role? Who will oversee it? In order for a peace process to be acceptable around the world in international institutions, it will have to be based on a much more solid structure and understanding of verification inside Afghanistan, to see what roles these different countries are playing.

Husain Haqqani: First, I must apologise to Lord Hannay for causing depression, but sometimes reality is depressing. In this case, we must understand that neither Russia nor Iran cares very much about the Afghan people. Pakistan is so single-minded in its obsession with India that it has also caused a lot of misery for the people of Afghanistan in the past.

It is very clear, even from the comments of my colleague Dr Ayesha Siddiqi, that there are certain myths and assumptions about Afghanistan in Pakistan that have not changed. Afghanistan may have objected for three days to Pakistan being admitted to the United Nations, but then it recognised Pakistan. Seventy-three years later, to keep citing that as an example of Afghan perfidy is not particularly helpful.

My fear is that Russia, Iran and Pakistan—all three neighbours, if we can call them that, because Russia is no longer a geographic neighbour of Afghanistan but is still a player—have more of a spoiler role in Afghanistan than a positive one. There are the complex desires of Pakistan, with an interim government. How can an interim government be for anything more than an interim period? All of that suggests that Pakistan knows what it does not want but does not know what it wants in Afghanistan.

As far as India's presence in Afghanistan is concerned, here is the problem. Iran, Russia and Pakistan do not have the economic wherewithal right now, or the inclination, to provide development assistance for Afghanistan. Young Afghans have to go somewhere to get educated. Certainly, no one wants to go to Iran, unless they want to go to the madrasa in Qom. No one wants to go to Russia to study. It is too

expensive in the West. India offers a good English education for a lot of Afghan elites.

Those are realities that keep bringing Afghanistan and India together. Pakistan's desire not to have any tolerance of any Indian role in Afghanistan is unrealistic. It will lead to Pakistan subverting any decision that is taken by people who sit around a table and look for fair outcomes, because, basically, the fair outcome is not what Pakistan wants.

Similarly, Iran wants to continue to meddle in Afghanistan, partly because there are people in Iran who think that the Persian-speaking population of Afghanistan in areas that adjoin Iran should rightfully look to Iran for everything, instead of looking outside. Afghanistan is a land-locked country with fewer resources than are necessary to run a functioning government. It was created as a buffer state at a point in history. Now, of course, the countries between which it was created as a buffer have plans for it that do not match the aspirations of its peoples.

Again, I am not very optimistic about the positive role that any of them is likely to play. Yes, they all want the Americans to withdraw. They are going through this process because it helps the American withdrawal. It is always convenient to be able to meddle in a small country when bigger countries than yourself are not there already. Eventually, the domestic Afghan situation will create rivalries that will require further meddling by the protégés of various players. At that point, I think we will see a breakdown in the neighbours' commitment to peace.

Lastly, Pakistan has always had a very complicated policy of trying to sell one argument to western governments and another to a domestic constituency. At home everybody is told that Islamic solidarity requires Pakistan to have a greater role in Afghanistan, but western governments are now being told, "When we bring the Taliban into the government, it will not be the dominant partner in the government, of course. It will just be a presence and have a role. You will have to continue to give economic assistance after withdrawing your forces".

I think that that is rather unrealistic and untenable. I do not see either the United States or other western governments falling for that, beyond a very short period of time. We will have a difficult situation once again, with domestic Afghan power-play and the neighbours' meddling coming back.

Q52 Lord Alton of Liverpool: I have two parliamentary interests to declare. I am co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Pakistan Minorities and vice-chair of the all-party country group on Pakistan.

Ambassador Haqqani and I have previously interacted about the role of radical ideology in threatening the stability of another part of the world: Indonesia. I pay tribute to him for his clarity and courage, and for his repeated exhortation to Pakistan to embrace its multi-ethnic identity.

Ambassador, you have said that using radical religious groups for political ends "unleashed a rampaging genie" from the bottle and that Pakistan

has become home to the world's "angriest Muslims" as a result. How would you both describe the current relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban?

Dr Ayesha Siddiqa: Pakistan and the Taliban have a relationship of both suspicion and mutual dependency. There is a bit of suspicion on both sides. Despite the fact that the Taliban has been something that Pakistan presents very proudly and in which Pakistan has really invested, there is also suspicion. There have been times when the Taliban believes that it has been let down by the Pakistan government. Pakistan's gripe is that the Taliban has not always listened to it. Yet, there is that dependency. There is no one else Pakistan would turn to in the same fashion as it does to the Taliban.

For Pakistan, a secular Afghanistan brings back the issue of what happens to the Durand Line. The security of Pakistan's territory is a question that haunts Pakistani decision-makers. For example, very recently Amrullah Saleh, from the present government, said that the fencing of the Durand Line, in the expectation that it will be turned into a boundary, will not be accepted at any cost.

That brings the Pakistani military and Pakistan's decision-makers to the Taliban, who, by the way, does not really support that idea, either. Its dependency is of a different fashion. The expectation is that in the long term, therefore, it may not necessarily push Pakistan back when it comes to territorial issues. The Taliban will not accept it and will not contribute to solving the issue, but it will not necessarily push Pakistan back.

For a long time, Pakistan has invested in the Haqqani network. Despite the fencing, certain parts of the border are still open for traffic, for different Taliban groups to come in and out. The Haqqani network has personal investments in property and businesses in Pakistan. Those are very solid interests, so the Taliban has huge stakes.

The other thing is that, over the years, Pakistan's security establishment's own ideological bent has made it closer in some ways to the Taliban. It feels more secure. Yes, there is always the risk of what happens when you have a Taliban government or Taliban next door.

Therefore, my argument is that, first, this time around Pakistan does not want to have total domination by the Taliban. Secondly, it continues to feel that, even with some form of Taliban representation in Kabul, it may be able to block that influence and not let it flow through its territory. That is the framework that it has.

Husain Haqqani: Before I answer the question, I thank Lord Alton for his advocacy on behalf of the embattled religious minorities of Pakistan and other countries. Unless and until we protect all minorities and recognise that radical Islamist groups are a major threat to religious minorities all over the Muslim world, we will not be able to secure the peace we talk about, including in Afghanistan.

Now let me answer the question. The Taliban has survived after 9/11 only because of Pakistan's support. Taliban leaders and their families have lived in Pakistan since 9/11. They still conduct all their business, including planning and execution of terrorist and military operations in Afghanistan, from their safe haven in Pakistan.

That said, Pakistani officials claim that they do not completely control the Taliban. Pakistan is unwilling to threaten the end of the safe haven to ensure Taliban compliance with its directives. That creates a situation where the Taliban maintains a degree of autonomy and, at the same time, remains independent of Pakistan. That is a function of Pakistan being unwilling or unable totally to control its protégés.

I will say one word about the oft-repeated argument that Pakistan wants the Taliban in the Afghan government but does not want it to dominate that government. I respect the argument. It is the official Pakistani position. It is something that makes sense to a lot of people in the West, and that may be a good negotiating position. My only point here is that that may be the desire of diplomats, but the Taliban has a world view, and that world view is totalitarian. It believes that its emir is the commander of the faithful and represents the will of God. With a belief system such as that, will it be content with having two or three ministries in a coalition government? Similarly, will it be possible for it to accept a policy being made by others when its belief system says that this is the only truth?

I think that that is itself a recipe for trouble. Pakistan is finding that out with the Taliban. While the Taliban is happy to receive Pakistani support and sponsorship, it often cites its beliefs when it comes to rejecting Pakistani suggestions. It is a complicated situation. I am of the opinion that it will come back to bite Pakistan, but Pakistan remains the Taliban sponsor. All Taliban who have come to negotiations and talks in Doha have either flown on Pakistani aircraft or travelled on Pakistani passports. Pakistan has influence with the Taliban but, for fear of losing that influence, it does not exercise it.

The Chair: I appreciate that we are fast approaching what is scheduled to be the end of our session at 5 pm. I understand that our excellent witnesses may be prepared to stay just a few minutes longer. The broadcasters have indicated that we can go on to 5.10 pm. I hope that our witnesses will accept that and thus continue for another 10 minutes.

Q53 Baroness Smith of Newnham: Like Lord Hannay, I feel much better informed but not necessarily very reassured by what we have been hearing this afternoon.

My question, as formally on the paper, is again about Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. However, given that the whole of this session has been on Afghan-Pakistani relations, I will not ask the questions on the paper, if that is acceptable.

What I would really like to know is whether there are ways in which the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan could be normalised, so

that we are not talking simply about a Pakistan-Taliban relationship.

Dr Ayesha Siddiq: It depends on what you mean by normalising. What do we call normalising of relations? With Pakistan and Afghanistan historically, this is perhaps the idea of having normal relations, in a more rational way—what we call normalising.

That is dependent on two factors. One is the nature of stability in Afghanistan. Afghanistan may continue to be an unstable place where there is a complete failure of intra-Afghan dialogue and it does not arrive at something.

Interestingly, the idea of a peace process or that the Taliban can be brought into the system has not necessarily been generated just by Pakistan. It is also an understanding of Afghan civil society and the current Afghan government. Afghan society, on the whole, has accepted that. It is possibly also something it has been convinced of by the United States itself, which has said, "All right. You must sit down with the Taliban, have those negotiations and, perhaps, normalise". A lot depends on what is the nature of stability in Afghanistan.

That is one point. The other question is: is Pakistan capable of having a different kind of relations—what you would call normal relations—with Afghanistan? First, it has the understanding that Afghanistan will remain this unstable for a long time. Pakistan accepts that instability.

Secondly, it continues to see Afghanistan through a very narrow security lens. I agree with my colleague Ambassador Haqqani that one of the major issues is Pakistan's own security lens. It is not willing to see Afghanistan any differently. Even during the 1990s, when a fledgling democracy was trying to find its feet in Pakistan and central Asia was much talked about, we were talking about military control. We were talking primarily about a security lens. Therefore, Pakistan is unable to do that. Once you have conditions that are not favourable, and a mindset that is not favourable either, you probably cannot have normal relations.

Husain Haqqani: I will try to make it short. Ideally, Pakistan should open transit trade with Afghanistan, including for India. Pakistan should open its universities and medical and engineering universities to students from Afghanistan. Pakistan should have a normal relationship that neighbours have, of tourists from both countries being able to visit interesting sites in each other's country. Unfortunately, that cannot happen because Pakistan has a security preoccupation.

Let us be realistic. Pakistan is the sixth largest nation in the world by population. It has the sixth largest army, and the 11th most powerful army, in terms of firepower, but it is only 25th by size of GDP on a PPP basis and 42nd in nominal GDP. It spends less than 1% on healthcare and less than 1.5% on education. Forty-nine per cent of school-going children in Pakistan complete primary education and do not go beyond that. Pakistan has the world's second largest population of out-of-school children. A country that has determined its priorities in such a way that

having nuclear weapons makes it strong and big and takes priority over educating its children is definitely not one that is going to understand how to have a de-securitised relationship with Afghanistan.

Q54 Baroness Helic: What is your assessment of the internal stability of the government in Kabul, especially the relationship between President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah? To what extent does the strength or weakness of that relationship form the basis for the resolution of the ongoing tensions?

Dr Ayesha Siddiq: As we are running out of time, I will be very quick. We make a lot of the differences between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. These are not ideological differences. They are about very real-term interests. They are about power interests. They want a position in the power structure. That is what they are aiming for. Of course, it has an impact on the ongoing peace negotiations, but I do not see that as a critical problem in itself.

There are other players on the sidelines whom we are ignoring at the moment. For example, former President Karzai has a game of his own and is positioning himself to come to power at some stage. The understanding of both Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah at the moment is that they both benefit from a constitutional order. Therefore, if a constitutional order is conditional on a peace agreement, they will go by it.

Husain Haqqani: Dr Ayesha Siddiq has definitely summarised it well. Politics creates unusual situations in which people who should be working together work at cross-purposes. I think that the conflict between Abdullah Abdullah and Mr Ashraf Ghani is no worse than the conflict between the Republicans and the Democrats right now in the United States.

The fact remains that in the case of Afghanistan both major actors and other actors have a vested interest in the system that has been built since 9/11. None of them wants to return to the emirate or to unstable interim governments. That is why the position of all of them seems to be that the Taliban needs to come to us and to become part of the system. It can run for election if it wants. However, the Taliban knows that it is an absolute minority and would not have a chance in an electoral democracy, which is why it wants external actors to create circumstances in which it can have more than its rightful share of power.

The domestic politics of Afghanistan is messy. Unfortunately, it will remain messy, but the silver lining is that the political actors in Kabul have the capacity to understand that the system offers them all opportunities that the breakdown of the system will not.

The Chair: I thank both of our witnesses today. You have certainly left us much better informed of the challenges that we face ahead as we continue with our inquiry. You have given us the great depth of your experience and painted a picture of the various competing issues that we

need to face as the UK in our relationship with Afghanistan.

Husain Haqqani: Thank you very much for having us.