

Development as freedom?

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MD. ANISUR RAHMAN

"Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

John F. Kennedy

"Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible."

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

We are witnessing today the collapse of the world economic and financial order based on the philosophy of individual freedom that Amartya Sen has espoused in his treatise *Development as Freedom* and that has so far been the ideological ethos of the leading economy of the world.

US President Obama is invoking community service and is going to the grassroots, joining ordinary folks to paint walls as a demonstration of his own commitment to this value. Can we, then, revisit this philosophy of individualism?

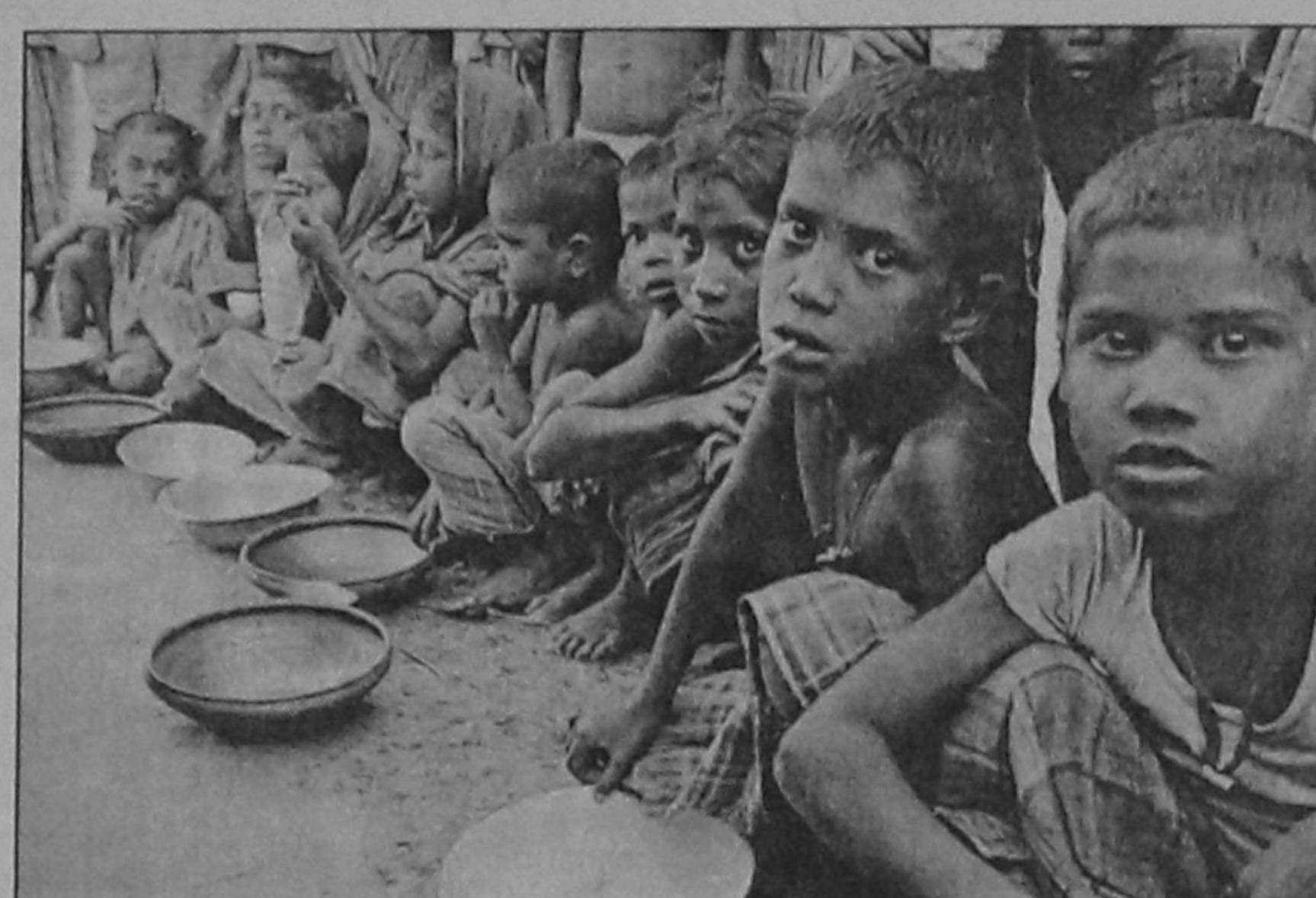
First, the notion of "individual identity" is rather vague. Humans, as babies, are nursed by some "collective" or other - first, one's own family, then other relatives, and in the laps of neighbours/members of the local community. Thus, growing up one acquires a sense of oneness in some degree with other humans and human communities, with the ecology, a sense with which one gets inclined to sacrifice for one's own family, for the wider community or society, for

the country, for the ecology, even to give one's life in specific situations for such wider entities.

The very awareness of one's "self," thus gets intertwined in various degrees with an awareness of belonging to some "collective" identity or other. And often this sense gets transformed in newer circumstances, with newer experiences, e.g. living or working together, facing crisis situations together, doing community service together, engaging in social struggles together, fighting national liberation wars together.

Secondly, since human beings are not Robinson Crusoes, since they are social beings, even their urges as individuals are influenced by others' thinking and values. Furthermore, the self-satisfaction from one's own achievements is also in general dependent on recognition by some or other human quarter(s), and likewise one's personal values and urges to engage in different callings are also influenced by interactions with and values of others, be this the wider society or a smaller community or one's own family or circle of friends and colleagues. Hence the suggestion inherent in the concept of "individual freedom" that one aspires to walk along a path of purely personal urges also misses the mark -- it is to a greater or less degree urged influenced by others' values and desires as well.

For these two reasons the "individual" identity of a person is not an identity dissociated from everyone else, and



What does freedom mean to them?

hence the concept of "individual freedom" is not amenable to definition as a distinctive concept upon which the development philosophy for any society can be constructed.

A lot of research on this question has been done in social psychology (e.g. Triandis 1988), which contains numerous elaborations and illustrations of inseparable unity of a person's awareness of self-identity with some or other wider communal identity or identities.

Besides, to claim the concept of individual freedom, however defined, as the foundation of development philosophy also calls for clarifying the import of this philosophy for humanity. As Swedish sociologists Backstrand and Ingelstam have observed: "Individual freedom is meaningless and dangerous when not rooted in an ethic and enlightened by social and spiritual considerations."

This should not need arguing in view of exhibitions of indeed dangerous individualist and sectarian conduct throughout

human history by persons enjoying high degrees of individual freedom by virtue of money and social power, with perhaps a first order crisis for humanity rooted in such conduct that we are witnessing today.

Thus the suggestion of individual freedom as the foundational concept of development is potentially a rather dangerous one, and initiatives to morally enlighten individual action as well as to provide for safeguards against abuse of individual freedom need to be actively pursued.

The desired ethical conduct of individuals may not be ensured merely by "public discussions and social interactions, which are themselves influenced by participatory freedoms" as Sen suggests. Participatory freedom may be very insufficient to ensure *social justice*, particularly in conditions like unequal distribution of economic power, asymmetrical economic inter-dependence and patron-client type socio-economic relations.

Furthermore, some ethical views representing the most enlightened thinking of human civilization, e.g. the ethics of human rights, stand above any society-determined values, expressing concerns of all humanity, which has a stake in how any individual society conducts itself.

Thus all enlightened social thinking encourages service to the community especially to the needy, and this principle is also enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as quoted above, through which world humanity is demanding accountability from any society beyond the consensus of its own people even if fully democratic.

Even apart from these philosophical and spiritual considerations, a suggestion of identifying the goal of development as expansion of individual freedom would be particularly harmful for a country like Bangladesh. The country has relatively less land in proportion to population, and an individualist ethic would invite intense competition for ownership of land by fair means or foul as well as activities that would devastate the environment, as is actually happening from actions motivated by this ethic.

On the other hand, many of the country's disadvantaged, finding it difficult to advance with individual resources alone, are joining hands in various kinds of collective endeavours, and are thereby advancing in their lives.

For poverty alleviation and development that may benefit the disadvantaged in this country, the importance of such collective endeavours is indisputable and is independent of any social ideology. Whether such endeavours are expanding "individual freedom" of those engaged in them and, therefore, whether in Sen's terms "development" is taking place for these people, would be a totally wrong question.

The relevant question is whether such

persons are advancing toward fulfilling their own life's urges as evolved from their own life's situations, experiences, possibilities, and interactions with other members of their kind.

A word, finally, for Barack Obama, who is desperately seeking to salvage his country and is invoking community service, rightly, as one strategy. I suggest that he think of deeper community solidarity, to the extent of invoking Americans to share in the current hardship together, instead of the more fortunate witnessing their partners in enterprises get laid off.

The ceiling Obama has capped on the salary of public servants is a salutary move. He has no authority to do this in the private sector; but he can invite the private sector managements to propose salary cuts for all without lay-offs as a mark of solidarity with their employees.

By such measure, if this could be widely shared, market demand for most consumables will also stop declining which Obama is seeking to face by huge deficit spending to finance the creation of new jobs, a time-consuming measure by itself. And he can announce national honours for enterprises that respond to this invocation. I understand that the Japanese have a similar culture of sharing hardships together in their enterprises during bad times.

And Obama himself could also take a salary cut to set the ultimate example.

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Growing green

What we need is both stimulus and long-term investments that accomplish two objectives simultaneously with one global economic policy response -- a policy that addresses our urgent and immediate economic and social needs and that launches a new green global economy. In short, we need to make "growing green" our mantra.



BAN KI-MOON and AL GORE

ECONOMIC stimulus is the order of the day. This is as it must be, as governments around the world struggle to jump-start the global econ-

omy. But even as leaders address the immediate need to stimulate the economy, so too must they act jointly to ensure that the new de facto economic model being developed is sustainable for the planet and our future on it.

First, a synchronised global recession requires a synchronised global response. We need stimulus and intense co-ordination of economic policy among all main economies. We must avoid the beggar-thy-neighbour policies that contributed to the Great Depression. Co-ordination is also vital for reducing financial volatility, runs on currencies and rampant inflation as well as for instilling consumer and investor confidence. In Washington last November, G 20 leaders expressed their determination "to enhance co-operation and work together to restore global growth and achieve needed reforms in the world's financial systems". This needs to happen urgently.

Stimulus is intended to jump-start the economy, but if properly conceived and executed it can also launch us on a new, low-carbon path to green growth. Some \$2,250 billion (\$1,750 billion, £1569 billion) of stimulus has already been announced by 34 nations. This stimulus, along with new initiatives by other countries, must help catapult the world economy into the 21st cen-

tury, not perpetuate the dying industries and bad habits of yesteryear. Indeed, continuing to pour trillions of dollars into carbon-based infrastructure and fossil fuel subsidies would be like investing in sub-prime real estate all over again.

Eliminating the \$300 billion in annual global fossil fuel subsidies would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 6 percent, and would add to global gross domestic product. Developing renewable energy will help where we need it most. Already, developing economies account for 40 percent of existing global renewable resources as well as 70 percent of solar water heating capacity.

Leaders everywhere, notably in the US and China, are realising that green is not an option but a necessity for recharging their economies and creating jobs. Globally, with 2.3 million people employed in the renewable energy sector, there are already more jobs there than directly in the oil and gas industries. In the US, there are now more jobs in the wind industry than in the entire coal industry. President Barack Obama's and China's stimulus packages are a critical step in the right direction and their green components must be followed through urgently.

We urge all governments to expand green stimulus elements, including energy efficiency, renewables, mass

transit, new smart electricity grids and reforestation, and to coordinate their efforts for rapid results.

Second, we need "pro-poor" policies now. In much of the developing world, governments do not have the option to borrow or print money to cushion the devastating economic blows. Therefore, governments in industrialised countries must reach beyond their borders and invest immediately in those cost-effective programs that boost the productivity of the poorest. Last year, food riots and unrest swept more than 30 countries. Obviously, this was even before September's financial implosion, which sparked the global recession that has driven a further 100 million people deeper into poverty. We must act now to prevent further suffering and potential widespread political instability.

This means increasing overseas development assistance this year. It means strengthening social safety nets. It means investing in agriculture in developing countries by getting seeds, tools, sustainable agricultural practices and credit to smallholder farmers so they can produce more food and get it to local and regional markets.

Pro-poor policy also means increasing investments in better land use, water conservation and drought-resistant crops to help farmers adapt

to a changing climate, which -- if not addressed -- could usher in chronic hunger and malnutrition across large swaths of the developing world.

Third, we need a robust climate deal in Copenhagen in December. Not next year. This year. The climate negotiations must be dramatically accelerated and given attention at the higher levels, starting today. A successful deal in Copenhagen offers the most potent global stimulus package possible.

With a new climate framework in hand, business and government will finally have the carbon price signal businesses have been clamouring for, one that can unleash a wave of innovation and investment in clean energy. Copenhagen will provide the green light for green growth. This is the basis for a truly sustainable economic recovery that will benefit us and our children's children for decades to come.

For millions of people from Detroit to Delhi these are the worst of times. Families have lost jobs, homes, healthcare and even the prospect of their next meal. With so much at stake, governments must be strategic in their choices. We must not let the urgent undermine the essential. Investing in the green economy is not an optional expense. It is a smart investment for a more equitable, prosperous future.

Ban Ki-moon is UN Secretary-General. Al Gore is former US Vice-President.

Afghan pitfalls

President Obama still has time to put on hold his plans to send more troops to Afghanistan. Instead, the best political minds around the world should be examining the least costly exit from a war that promises to become a quagmire, at best, and, at worst, a disaster, which no US objective in the region can justify.

M. SHAHID ALAM

As the United States prepares to escalate its eight-year war against the Taliban, it might be useful to weigh its chances of success.

Consider, first, the fate of three previous invasions of Afghanistan by two great European powers, Britain and Soviet Union, since the nineteenth century.

These invasions ended in defeat -- for the Europeans.

The first British occupation of Kabul lasted for four years. When the British garrison retreated from Kabul in 1842, it was picked off by Ghilzai warriors as the soldiers trudged through the snow. Only one British officer, William Brydon, survived this harrowing retreat. This solitary survivor was memorialised in a haunting painting, *Remnants of an Army*, by Elizabeth Butler.

The British occupied Kabul a second time in 1878 but withdrew a year later, leaving behind a British resident to keep an eye on the Afghans. They returned the same year, when their resident in Kabul was killed in an uprising. When the British withdrew in 1880, discreetly, they did not insist on leaving behind a British resident.

Nearly a hundred years later, 30,000 Soviet troops, invading from the north, occupied Kabul in December 1979. In order to oppose the growing Afghan resistance, the Russians soon raised their troop strength to 100,000, but never controlled any areas beyond the limits of a few cities. With 15,000 deaths, and unable to sustain growing casualties, the Soviets retreated in February 1989.

Will the United States fare better than Britain or the Soviet Union?

In terms of logistics, British India and Soviet Union were better placed than the

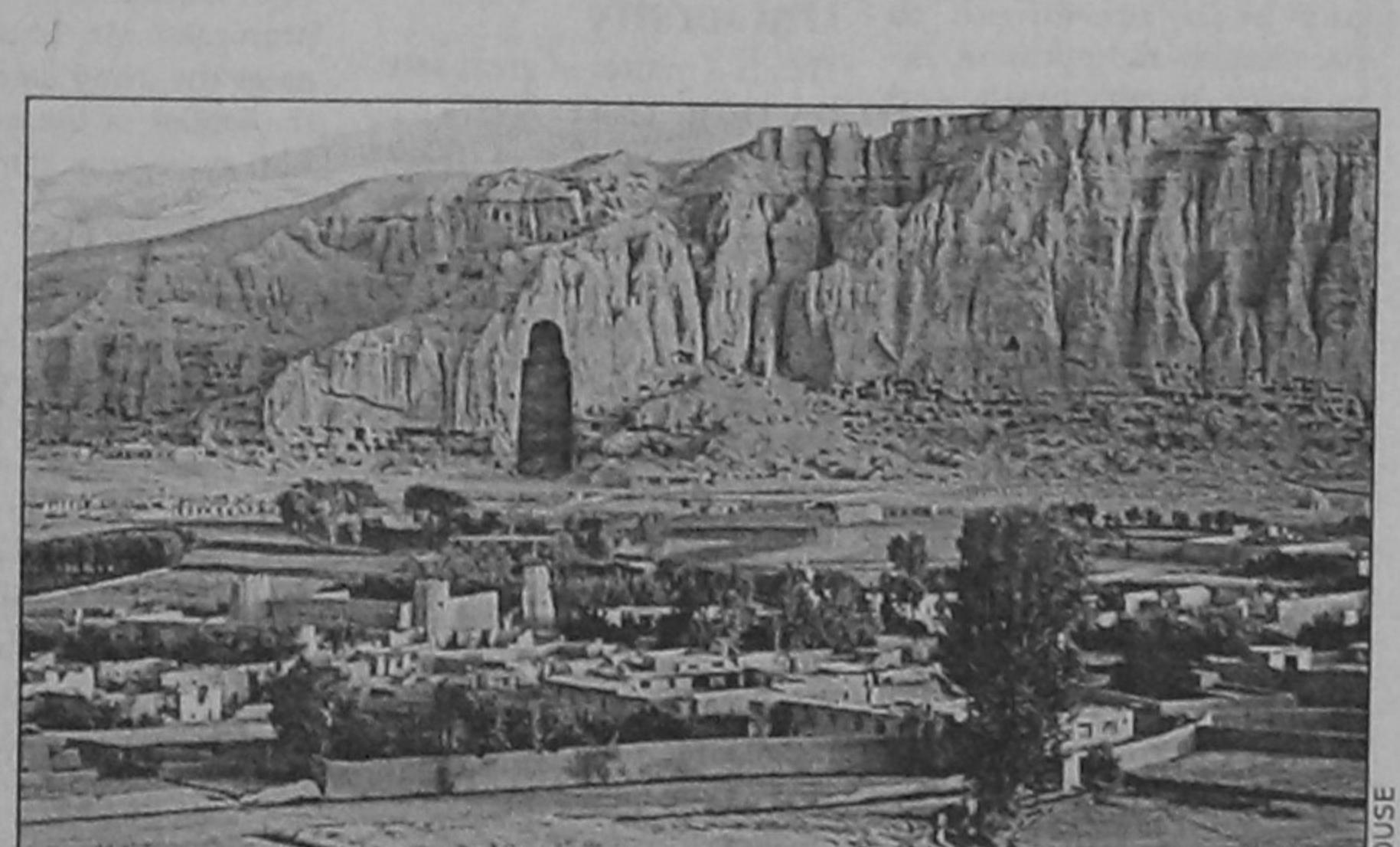
United States. Afghanistan was next-door neighbour to both. It is half a world away from the United States, which, as a result, depends on long rail and road transit through Pakistan to supply and re-supply its troops. Moreover, the supply routes -- from Karachi to Kabul -- are vulnerable to attacks by the Taliban and their allies in Pakistan.

Alternative land supply routes would have to pass through Russia or Iran. Russia might make these routes available, at a steep cost, and keep raising the cost as US troop concentration in Afghanistan rises. Dependence on the Russians may turn out to be trap. Almost certainly, the Iranians will refuse, since allowing the passage would badly tarnish its image with Sunni Islam.

The Soviet and British invaders primarily had to deal with Afghan fighters. The

Americans are fighting the Taliban on both sides of the Afghan border, who also have help from several *jihadi* groups based in Punjab and Pakistani Kashmir, with the Pushtuns.

Pakistan, America's indispensable ally in the war against the Taliban, is an unwilling partner at best; it is also unreliable. The Pakistani army has been gang-pressed and bribed into fighting the



Afghanistan: Unconquerable?

Americans, ensuring a long stalemate between them and the Taliban.

In light of the consequences that have flowed from the US presence in Afghanistan, who will advise an escalation? President Obama still has time to put on hold his plans to send more troops to Afghanistan. Instead, the best political minds around the world should be examining the least costly exit from a war that

promises to become a quagmire, at best, and, at worst, a disaster, which no US objective in the region can justify.

Unless, dismantling the world's only Islamicate country with the bomb is an objective worthy of such horrendous costs.

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