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Mullah Zaeef and Taliban diplomacy: an English School approach

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Abstract. The recent revival of interest in the English School has emphasised the historical and, hence, impermanent and incomplete character of international societies. Its focus has been upon the circumstances in which specific societies come into being, flourish and fade, with a view to making better sense of what is happening in and to the contemporary international society of states. Recent commentary, however, has noted both the insistence of the first generation of the English School upon the importance of diplomacy and its failure to develop any significant empirical work upon this insight. This case study of Mullah Zaeef and the Taliban embassy in Islamabad in the two years before the Afghan war seeks to rectify that shortcoming by providing an analysis of diplomatic activity in a context where there is little intersubjective understanding of both what an international society is or ought to be and the elements of the diplomatic culture which helps sustain it. It argues that while war was not averted, the episode provides grounds for modest optimism about the possibility of surmounting the obstacles to resolving conflicts of this kind in the future.

> *. . . if there are rules of diplomacy and laws of foreign policy, these must be valid whether the business is conducted by men or women, whites or blacks, monarchies or democracies, cabinets or parliaments . . .*[1]
>
> (Herbert Butterfield)

> *. . . Anybody who talks to us should do so within Islam's framework. The Holy Koran cannot adjust itself to other people's requirements, people should adjust themselves to the requirements of the Holy Koran . . .*[2]
>
> (Attorney General Mauli Jalilullah Maulvizada)

> *. . . Every day, I am in front of different people, different cultures and different languages . . . They all have different habits. I have to convey our message, [but not be] very emotional. I should convince people [by being] plausible... We Muslims believe that the lie is not good. This is one of the many reasons that makes this job difficult . . .*[3]
>
> Ambassador Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef

When Mullah Zaeef, ambassador-designate of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, paid a courtesy call on his colleague Fik Ozulovic,

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[1] Herbert Butterfield, 'The New Diplomacy And Historical Diplomacy', in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), pp. 182–3.

[2] Attorney-General Maulvi Jalilullah Maulvizada, cited in Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 112.

[3] Ambassador Zaeev, interview with Preston Mendenhall for MSNBC, <www.msnbc.com/news>, 30 October, 2001.

the ambassador of Bosnia Herzogovina, in July 2000, it was a sign of how far and how fast both Zaeef and those he represented had come. The two ambassadors were reported to have discussed matters of mutual interest. Zaeef had expressed his government's concern at the massacre of Bosnian Muslims in the early 1990s and informed his counterpart of '. . . the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan aggravated by the UN sanctions against the Taliban . . .'[4] Zaeef was the second Taliban ambassador to Islamabad and, sixteen months after his arrival, he briefly captured international attention by a series of press conferences he held during the Afghan war. So successful was the spectacle of bearded, turbaned and (to Western eyes, at least) exotic strangers stealing the headlines and setting the message hours before London and Washington were functioning that the Americans and British scrambled to establish their own information centre in Islamabad. Within a few weeks of this public relations triumph, however, the Taliban had been defeated and their brief flirtation with membership of the international society of states was at an end. In a descent as steep and swift as his rise, Zaeef was stripped of his diplomatic immunity by the Pakistanis, deported to Afghanistan and handed over to the Americans who eventually moved him, shackled and blind-folded, to their detention camp at Guantanamo in Cuba.

My purpose here is to tell the story of Zaeef's brief diplomatic career from a broadly English School perspective, which emphasises the importance of the concept of an international society which results from people's ideas about how international relations are and should be conducted and which, through its institutional expression, encourages certain types of international behaviour while discouraging others. The case of Mullah Zaeef's ambassadorship is an interesting one for three reasons. First, as a study of an intense period of diplomatic activity it provides a vivid demonstration of the injunction of the first generation of English School theorists that international relations, like other human relations, consist primarily and ultimately of nothing more and nothing less than individual personalities acting on their understandings of what is and what ought to be going on.[5] In this case, the individuals are diplomats, those charged with representing the members of an international society. Secondly, it provides an excellent opportunity to see what the English School's insistence on the historical and, hence, impermanent character of specific international societies might mean for actual international relations as they are presently being conducted.[6] For what we have in Zaeef's short career, and indeed in the Taliban episode generally, is a rather stark encounter between at least two visions of the world, the established order of the modern international society of states on the one hand and the coming transcendent, transnational Islamic order of the Taliban on the other, occurring on the extremely ambiguous and problematic terrain of a post-colonial state, Pakistan, which exists in the teeth of alternative tribal, national, and religious articulations of how its people should be organised. Finally, the story brings to the fore the idea of a diplomatic culture which seems to

[4] *Frontier Press*, 19 July, 2000.

[5] See Iver B. Neumann,'The English School on Diplomacy', *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy*, 79 (Cligendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, March 2002), and Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

[6] Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 11.

exert a powerful socialising force on its bearers, and raises questions about its provenance, to what extent is it derived from the prevailing international society as opposed to some simple process of conducting relations with one another under conditions of anarchy or a thin social context which is very much like it, and about its significance and effectiveness beyond the magic circle of the diplomats themselves.[7]

The immediate scene for the story is the Islamabad diplomatic corps in the two years before the recent Afghan war. The principal actor in the story is Mullah Zaeef, and it is about how he encountered and made adjustments to the world of modern diplomacy in his efforts to serve his masters in Kabul and Kandahar (although accommodations by his professional colleagues to his requests also play a part in the story). The prevailing tone of the story is one of sympathy with a man in a predicament, although this should not be assumed to imply either sympathy for his cause or that he had no part in his own predicament. The story itself may be told in Martin Wight's terms as a Kantian or revolutionary encounter with Groatian or rational practices upon what increasingly became a Machiavellian or realist carpet.[8] The carpet was eventually pulled from under the Taliban diplomat's feet. However, it was not pulled as quickly or as cleanly as one might have expected, and not before revealing glimpses of an international society, the diplomatic culture of which at least, was neither as exclusive in its practices nor as challenged by new social forces as is sometimes supposed. Rather, the resulting diplomatic encounter was characterised by the efforts of people from different backgrounds to establish and maintain the reasonable and humane grounds upon which they could reliably communicate with one another about preserving peace if possible, and the ends for which war would be conducted if necessary.

The Taliban's rise to power and the question of international acceptance

Mullah Zaeef, by his own account, had been a mujaheddin since he was fourteen, fighting the Russians originally, and he had participated in Mullah Omar's famous raid in 1994 to rescue the victim of a sexual assault by a local military commander who was subsequently hanged from the gun barrel of a tank.[9] Within two years of that raid, by a combination of moral force, Pakistani military assistance and Saudi money, the Taliban had captured Kabul in order, as their leaders put it, to end the civil war in Afghanistan and to install a government of good Muslims who would re-establish Sharia law. Unable to find Muslims of sufficient virtue, the Taliban had established their own government in the Afghan capital which received its religious direction and, increasingly, its political direction from the Kandahar Shura around

[7] James Der Derian, 'Hedley Bull and the Idea of a Diplomatic Culture', in Rick Fawn and Jeremy Larkin (eds.), *International Society After the Cold War: Anarchy and Order Reconsidered* (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan, 1996).

[8] Martin Wight (edited by Gabriele Wight and Brian Porter), *International Theory: The Three Traditions* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1992).

[9] Mark Barker, 'Mullah Zaeef: whispering voice of the Taliban', in <*TheAge.com.au*>, 1 November, 2001.

Mullah Omar.[10] The Islamabad embassy was established in 1997 after a Taliban victory at Mazar-i-Sharif against factions supporting the former government. This success tempted the Pakistanis into accepting their clients as the legitimate government and urging others to do likewise. The military success had proved short-lived, however, and only Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had followed suit. As a consequence, the Islamabad embassy became the Taliban's most important mission.

In addition to the embassy, Zaeef was responsible for three consulates at Karachi, Quetta and Peshawar and worked closely with political and religious agencies which also operated in the Taliban interest. By the time of his appointment, the principal tasks of the mission had been well-established: to facilitate transnational contacts between subnational and transnational religious and tribal organisations in both countries and beyond, insofar as these supported the Taliban's efforts to finish the civil war and establish their version of Sharia throughout Afghanistan; to support the campaign to secure international recognition of the Kabul authorities as the legitimate government of all of Afghanistan; and to conduct a 'normal' bilateral relationship with Pakistan over a wide range of issues. The first activity is the least well-documented but while it was the most likely to involve the sinister activities associated with international terrorism, it also seemed to correspond to the more mundane aspects of ordinary diplomatic representation, for example, visits to madressahs to meet religious and tribal leaders and to speak at their mass meetings.

The mission's contribution to the campaign for international recognition was initially limited by the Taliban's general strategy which was essentially a power-political approach of winning the war, gaining effective control of the country and demanding that Afghanistan's seat at the UN be taken from the previous government. Recognition was very important to the Taliban for both practical and existential reasons. As one of their leaders complained at the high tide of their military fortunes, the Taliban had captured the capital, conquered three-quarters of the country and yet had not received a single telegram of congratulations. '. . . We don't have . . .' Mullah Mohamed Hassan said, '. . . a friend in the world . . .'[11] As the agents of God in a wicked world, however, the Taliban were never entirely sure that they wanted friends.[12] Indeed, rejection affirmed their claim to be who they were. Thus radical righteousness combined with a sense of diminished moral responsibility towards the unrighteous to dictate that recognition should be wrenched from a hostile world by the exercise of power rather than won by the conduct of diplomacy. The problem with this strategy was that it was beyond the Taliban's means, not least because even the military strategy depended on a measure of goodwill from elements

[10] Jürgen Kleiner, 'The Taliban and Islam', in *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 11: 1, pp. 19–32. For an account of the Taliban's rise to power, see *Rashid* and William Maley, *The Foreign Policy of the Taliban*, Council On Foreign Relations 2000.

[11] John Burns, *New York Times*, 24 November 1996, cited in *Rashid*, p. 54.

[12] Scholarship on Islamic international thought suggests a division between dar ul Islam (abode of peace) and dar ul-harb (abode of war), see Thomas Naff, 'The Ottoman Empire and the European States System' in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds.), *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 144. Hafeez Malik says the Taliban employ a four-part division of the world: dar al-kaffir (non-Moslem states), dar al munafiqin (hypocrite Moslem states); irreligious countries like Turkey; and dar al-Islam (good Muslim states). The way in which these are applied and by whom is not clear, 'The Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan: Its Impact on Eurasia', *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, VI: 1 (Winter/Spring 1999), p. 142.

in the United Nations (UN) which the Taliban singularly failed to achieve.[13] Only as the Taliban leadership came to realise this and shifted their emphasis to a more diplomatic strategy directed at the great powers rather than the UN, did the Islamabad mission's role in the quest for recognition become more important.

Accordingly, the bilateral relationship with Pakistan absorbed much of the embassy's energies. The Pakistanis may have sponsored Taliban membership of the international society for political reasons, but there was a great deal of practical business to conduct. During the period under study, agreements for the export of electrical power, the construction of dams, the transfer of wheat and the re-establishment of the Afghan olive industry were negotiated, as were agreements on the treatment of prisoners and refugees and the movement of people, and Zaeef was deeply involved in arranging the ministerial visits which such agreements require. The effective claim to represent people drew the representative of even such an outlaw, outcast and reluctant movement as the Taliban into extensive contacts over mundane issues, not only with the Pakistanis but also with the representatives of other countries. It did so because the people Zaeef represented, whether they were traders, nationals working abroad, refugees or even (or especially) religious volunteers for violent transnational projects, had to have recognised and reciprocated paperwork. How else was their status in the jurisdictions from which they had come, to where they were going, and where they might happen to be in transit to be established?

It did so also because the other members of the international society needed someone they could be reasonably sure could speak, listen and act for the Taliban when matters of mutual interest – prisoners, terrorists, narcotics or opportunities for commerce – arose. Once the Saudi and UAR missions had been reduced as punishment for the Taliban's association with Al Qaeda attacks, the Islamabad mission was perforce the only point for such contacts. As a consequence, the representatives of the Taliban were drawn into the broader professional and social network of the Islamabad diplomatic corps, the former principally by bilateral meetings of substance at their colleagues' missions, the latter by invitations to the representational events and ceremonies, principally but not exclusively, of their host and the two other states which had already recognised the Taliban.[14]

Zaeef and the great powers

Nevertheless, the former guerrilla and minor cleric remained on the fringes of Islamabad's diplomatic society as he waited for his predecessor to leave. There is

[13] The Taliban's relations with the UN had begun badly when their fighters entered the UN compound in Kabul where Najibullah, the last pro-Soviet leader, had enjoyed sanctuary since 1993, and removed him to be tortured and murdered. They worsened following the detention in 1997 of a European Commissioner after photographs were taken in a hospital without permission, and almost collapsed after the US charged that Al Qaeda terrorists based in Afghanistan had been responsible for the attacks on the US embassies in East Africa in 1998.

[14] Neither their professional nor their social diplomatic intercourse was ever restricted to the missions of those countries with whom their government enjoyed full diplomatic relations. One former European ambassador to Kabul recalls that after inviting Zaeef to a dinner he was asked why he had done so in the absence of such relations. The ambassador replied that Zaeef had looked hungry. Political considerations *per se* had not prompted the invitation. It was simply the humane and civil thing to do.

little to suggest that Zaeef wanted it otherwise and did not share his political masters' commitment to the military approach to securing recognition from the kafirs of dar ul-harb. The war had been going well. In September 2000, the Taliban had finally captured Taloqan, the last major city in opposition hands, after a long siege and this, it was believed, would bolster the claim for recognition when it came up for discussion at the UN in November. Just a month later and a week before he formally assumed his post, however, his position was transformed by an attack on an American warship in the Yemen.[15] As the representative of associates and possibly patrons of the suspected perpetrators of this outrage, it might be expected that Zaeef and his mission would have been cast out of the polite society in which they had just so recently acquired their precarious toehold. In fact, the reverse occurred and Zaeef was precipitated into a series of high profile bilateral meetings with the American ambassador, William Milam, and the British High Commissioner, Hilary Sinott, which were to continue right up until the final outbreak of hostilities. Zaeef had not bombed his way to the top table (or had it bombed for him). His predecessor had met with the Americans on occasions. What made the meetings possible was that Zaeef was in post and that patterns of communication had already been established. However, it was the bombings which gave the meetings and Zaeef a new significance.

In substantive terms, however, the initial meetings were not a success. Milam wanted Bin Laden and an end to the Al Qaeda bases in Afghanistan. He probably laid out the likely downward path in terms of further UN sanctions if Taliban cooperation was not forthcoming but, in compensation for this unpleasant communication, he was able to assure Zaeef that rumours of another American attack were the work of the media. Zaeef, in contrast, flush with military success and American praise for the Taliban's ban on poppy cultivation, sought US support for the recognition campaign at the UN. With UN recognition, he maintained, foreign intervention would cease and the '. . . problems of Afghanistan . . . would be immediately solved . . .'[16] The meeting was not so much a negotiation, therefore, as an encounter between parties with little mutual understanding of what was supposed to be going on. Its real significance, however, lay in the fact that it had happened at all and that the ambassadors continued to meet, even after the UN had rebuffed the Taliban's request for Afghanistan's seat once again. The US and Britain wanted diplomatic contacts with Afghanistan, and, whatever problems currently existed with the specifics of Afghanistan's international personality, talking with the ambassador of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan provided at least one way of obtaining them.

And, notwithstanding his distaste for what they represented and would probably have to say to him, Zaeef was happy to reciprocate.

An immediate substantive consequence of this procedural success was that people, especially members of the media, began to pay more attention to what the Taliban ambassador had to say. It was from Zaeef that the rest of the world learned at first hand about the Taliban's sense of themselves as a religious movement which was seeking to establish the basic moral parameters within which mundane political,

[15] The attack on the USS Cole, which the US attributed to Al Qaeda.
[16] *IRIN-CA*, 8 November, 2000.

economic and social affairs might be conducted in Afghanistan. It was Zaeef who spelt out the reasons for their hostility to the UN as an interfering and ultimately self-serving set of alien and secular forces which, according to him, would not recognise the achievements of the Taliban because it needed 'problems' like them to justify its own existence. And, as he set about the task, to which he and his masters had been unaccustomed up to now, of explaining and justifying the Taliban's actions, Zaeef's implied audience became far richer than the world divided between an abode of peace and an abode of war of classical Islamic thought.

The UN, the Russians, Afghanistan's neighbours to the north and east were the problems. To other countries, according to Zaeef, '. . . China, the United Arab Emirates, America, France, Saudi Arabia . . .,' the Taliban extended thanks for their help.[17]

Most importantly, however, Zaeef provided the first clues to how, in his judgement, his political masters should be approached on '. . . the matter of Osama . . .' Neither Sharia nor Pashtun conventions of hospitality would permit Bin Laden's surrender to a secular power, especially on prudential grounds alone. Rather, the US would have to provide evidence of his involvement in terrorist operations to the Supreme Court of Afghanistan which would try him with the aid of religious scholars from Saudi Arabia and a third or fourth country and possibly with monitors from the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Without evidence, or if no solution was reached, the Taliban would '. . . contain and supervise . . .' Bin Laden to prevent him using Afghan territory as a base for operations against third countries.[18] Zaeef it appeared, was becoming interested in the possibility, and perhaps the necessity, of developing a different set of relations with the outside world but, insofar as he was, he faced two very difficult problems. It was by no means clear that those he represented shared this interest, and it was very clear that what he could offer the great powers was not sufficient to appease them.

Sanctions, women, Buddahs and the primacy of domestic policy

The most immediate consequence of the Taliban's refusal to extradite Bin Laden or close the Al Qaeda camps was the imposition of sanctions at the end of January 2001 previously agreed to by the UN Security Council. These involved restrictions on arms transfers, air travel and diplomatic representation. The latter posed immediate problems for Zaeef, for they required the closure of Taliban political offices and staff reductions at official missions in Pakistan. The Taliban, he declared, recognised that Pakistan had obligations under the UN Charter and would not '. . . let Pakistan suffer because of this . . .'[19] The offices in Peshawar, Quetta and Karachi were closed and staff reductions in all the Taliban's overseas missions were also reported.[20] Instead of excoriating the sanctions and their prime movers, however, Zaeef focused

[17] *IRIN-CA*, 8 November, 2000.
[18] Ibid. Zaeef refused to acknowledge the Al Qaeda camps.
[19] *Dawn*, 1 January, 2001.
[20] *Daily Star*, 27 January, 2001.

on how they were neither an effective nor authentic expression of the international community's attitude to the Taliban. Not only Islamic states, but others with whom Afghanistan enjoyed '. . . friendly relations . . . such as China, France, and Germany . . .' had expressed doubts about the sanctions, and he was confident that contacts would be maintained '. . . through various channels, including junior level diplomats . . .' The Taliban were ready to meet the new US president, George W. Bush, and as Zaeef noted, he continued to meet with the American ambassador.[21] Only Zaeef himself seemed to suffer the full force of the sanctions when he was refused a seat aboard a UN flight to Kabul. He had been using the UN service ever since earlier sanctions had grounded the Afghan airline *Ariana*, and was forced to travel by road.

Zaeef's own approach was matched by a softening in the UN conditions for a resumption of talks between the Taliban and their enemies, and by late February 2001 it was possible to say that the diplomatic community, at least, had absorbed the shock of the UN sanctions and had re-established contacts on the new terms set by them. There was intense speculation at the time that a deal had been struck by which Bin Laden would be surrendered for international recognition of the Taliban. However, Zaeef had explicitly rejected such a deal when it was reported in *The Times*, saying that '. . . We have not given shelter to Osama bin Laden so we can make a deal to hand him over . . .' for to do so, as he had pointed out a month earlier, would '. . . amount to giving a kind of superiority to non-Islamic laws over Islamic laws . . .'[22]

As this formulation suggested, so often what was at stake for the Taliban in its international disputes, were not so much the specific points at issue, but their commitment to a general form of life which they sought to advance in Afghanistan and the problems this posed for others. The most obvious issue in this regard was their treatment of women which had its origins in aspects of Islam, Pashtun culture, and the peculiar circumstances of the Deoband madressahs. The Taliban pursued a policy of separation between the sexes which entailed the subordination of women maintained by coercion, and this became the most neuralgic issue between them and much of the outside world, especially after the Bush administration decided to use it as fuel for its own military policy. It is, of course, an important part of a diplomat's job to explain and defend the domestic policies and practices of their country, especially when these become a matter of concern in the host state, and to relay those concerns to their home governments. As the lone Taliban ambassador, Zaeef was constantly engaged thus before large audiences and the Taliban's treatment of women often dominated such occasions. It did not seem to engage him much, however. The Taliban had acted, Zaeef would maintain, to end the abuse of women under the warlords. Now they were safe and accorded equal status with men, but in accordance with Islamic law and traditional Afghan practice. Any inequality in healthcare and education resulted from the exigencies of the civil war and international sanctions. Men had to be taken care of first '. . . since they . . . were supposed to be responsible for . . . the shelter and daily needs of women folks (sic) and children . . .'[23]

[21] *Dawn*, 21 January, 2001.
[22] *Dawn*, 12 February, 2001 and *Agence France Press* (AFP), 22 January, 2001.
[23] *Dawn*, 22 November, 2000.

It is tempting to see Zaeef's *pro forma* performances on the treatment of women as evidence of his socialisation into more cosmopolitan attitudes by the diplomatic community. There is little evidence to support this view and much to suggest that, like his masters, he simply regarded the Taliban's policy on women as non-negotiable, one of their principal achievements to be defended against incursions, be these from corrupt military commanders or from wicked international agencies which persisted in trying to hire women out of their rightful place in society. Insofar as he was socialised, it was not into the values of the international society as these were presented by his Western contacts, but into what the narrower professional code of the diplomatic culture had to say about dealing with difficult issues in hostile circumstances; be polite, avoid being drawn into an argument, and wait for the subject to change.

Corroborative evidence for this interpretation is provided by Zaeef's conduct on another domestic issue, the destruction of the two giant Buddhas at Bamiyan, and the campaign to destroy other religious images which occurred during the spring of 2001. This was widely assumed to be a response to UN sanctions and a part of a campaign by 'conservatives' within the Taliban to assert their authority over those who wished to make concessions to the international community on Bin Laden.[24] The Taliban said that such images were offensive to Islam and that their destruction was long overdue. They had been worshipped in the past and, unless they were destroyed, they might be worshipped again.[25] This precipitated an international outcry and Zaeef found himself cast by the representatives of the international society and his own government alike as first responder to a concerned procession of ambassadors, religious and cultural representatives, a UNESCO special envoy, the Secretary General of the UN, and finally representatives of Islamic authorities and the OIC, all seeking access to Mullah Omar in Kandahar. Zaeef and his mission relayed the official position but, in addition, they developed their own theme, especially when asked about the implication of the destruction of artefacts for people of other faiths in Afghanistan. Zaeef maintained that the Taliban '. . . respect Hindus and Sikhs and they will not be stopped from performing their rituals . . .'[26]

There was an inconsistency between this and the official view that destruction would prevent future idolatry made explicit a month later when Zaeef's deputy, Shaheen, said that had there been Buddhists in Afghanistan, '. . . there would not be destruction of the statues because the rule would apply to them as well . . .'[27] A gap thus existed between the mission and its government, or at least parts of the government. The statues were very big and their destruction took some time. Thus a series of reports from the mission followed the initial announcement, complete with threatened escalations and promised pauses, which would have done credit to a NATO briefing. The progress reports were accompanied by observations which noted how the outcry over the statues far exceeded reaction to the humanitarian plight of the Afghan people, a point given weight when the Japanese ambassador told him that the efforts to secure humanitarian assistance were being complicated

[24] *Asia Times*, 10 March, 2001..
[25] *Associated Press*, 27 February, 2001 and *Asia Times*, 1 March, 2001.
[26] *Asia Times*, 1 March, 2001.
[27] *Christian Science Monitor*, <ASikhs in Jalalabad@>, 13 April, 2001.

by the statues campaign.[28] Zaeef always promised to convey such considerations to his government, but in his talks with the UNESCO envoy, Pierre Lafrance, he made it clear that neither he nor any other secular representative would get access to Mullah Omar. The way forward, according to Zaeef, required other Islamic countries to exercise their '. . . moral authority . . .' on the Taliban.[29] A few days later, Zaeef made his own position clear.

> . . . I am not hopeful and not disappointed . . . whether the destruction will be stopped or will continue, but maybe if there is a message from religious scholars of the Arabic world this may help . . . So far we have not received any message or proposal which is based on reasons of Sharia (Islamic) law. If there is such a message it will be considered . . .[30]

Two days later, the Egyptian Foreign Minister announced that the Mufti of the Republic had decided that destroying the statues did not express the spirit of Islam. President Mubarak would send an envoy to Afghanistan. There were high hopes of success, and the Egyptian and Taliban embassies were reported to be working closely to set up the visit.[31] The next day Zaeef reported the arrival of an OIC delegation in Kandahar, declaring '. . . If both sides issue a unanimous fatwa (edict) saying the destruction of the statues is not proper, we will accept it . . .'[32] The mission failed. Muttawakil informed Annan that while the Kandahar Ulema had listened to its counterpart from other Islamic countries respectfully and would do so in the future, it had heard no good argument for halting the destruction. The ulema from abroad, he maintained, had only acted under pressure from non-Islamic countries.

Shortly after, Zaeef effectively closed the issue. During the final week of negotiations, he claimed, 500 children had starved to death in Afghanistan. '. . . Let us forget about Buddhas . . . and focus on saving millions of people in Afghanistan from hunger and misery brought on them by sanctions imposed by the United Nations . . .'[33] From the start, Zaeef had maintained that '. . . living people deserve more attention than these non-living things . . .,' an argument directed at the international community, but with implications for the doctrinal priorities of his own masters.[34] Although the statues policy was not a response to sanctions, Zaeef was also reported as saying in the midst of the negotiations that the 'relentless criticism' of the Taliban's policies on women, minorities and religious groups had not helped the search for a solution.[35] And once again he had signalled how progress might best be achieved with those whom he represented. His people were predisposed against secular authorities in general and moral criticism from them backed by material threats in particular. They needed to hear from appropriate Islamic authorities working within the framework prescribed by Sharia. The initiative had failed, but it was evidence that Zaeef and his colleagues were all interested in discovering a framework of understanding which could absorb the shock of events and enable them to find ways in which they could continue to talk productively with one another.

[28] *Dawn*, 6 March, 2001.
[29] *BBC News*, 3 March, 2001.
[30] *Associated Press*, 6 March, 2001.
[31] *Arabic News*, 10 March, 2001.
[32] *Irish Times*, 11 March, 2001 quoting *Afghan Islamic Press*.
[33] *Dawn*, 24 March, 2001.
[34] *CBS News Service*, 6 March, 2001.
[35] *AP*, 8 March, 2001.

Thus, in the remaining months before the attacks on 11 September an air of normality pervaded, if not all the issues, then the manner in which they were dealt with by the Taliban diplomats and their colleagues. Zaeef was involved in negotiations with the Pakistanis about prisoners, refugees and the release of duty-free goods from Karachi warehouses under the terms of a transit trade treaty. He was also busy getting the message out that Afghanistan was now open for business and investments especially from Islamic countries, and he met with his German and Japanese colleagues to explore the possibilities for development assistance and mediation. The UN relaxed its sanctions to allow the body of a Taliban minister who had died in Pakistan to be flown home on one of their aircraft, accompanied by full expressions of condolence from Musharaff.[36] The Taliban's campaigns to get non-Moslems to wear identification badges and everyone to stop watching television aroused only passing concern.[37] Milam and his replacement, Wendy Chamberlin, continued to meet with Zaeef, and the Americans praised the Taliban's drug policy and offered them $1.5 m in compensatory financing for farmers. A Congressional delegation met with Zaeef at the end of August, two weeks before the attacks, to discuss Bin Laden's extradition, the rights of women and the security of foreigners in Afghanistan.[38] Even the final squall before the attacks, the arrest of international aid workers in Kabul on the charge they had engaged in Christian proselytising, did not cause undue disturbance. Zaeef treated it as a consular matter and turned it over to his subordinate, Shaheen, who predicted that the workers would be released in good time provided they had not succeeded in converting anyone.[39]

Going public: Zaeef's crisis diplomacy

Of course the biggest shock of all was administered to Taliban diplomacy by the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. We do not know whether Zaeef knew about them, and our suppositions remain formed more by prejudice than anything else. One can only note that he had no need to know. Zaeef condemned the attacks as acts of terrorism which were inconsistent with Islam, but maintained they were beyond the technical ability of Bin Laden, who was under surveillance and lacked trained pilots, and he reiterated the request for evidence if the US wanted Bin Laden tried.[40] He promised a strong response to anyone who would not accept the Taliban's denial, and his deputy declared that if any neighbouring country provided '. . . territorial way or airspace to the USA against our land, it would draw us into an imposed war . . .' The target of this threat was made clear by reports of Taliban artillery being moved to the border with Pakistan and a refusal by the Taliban to deny that local Pashtuns might be mobilised against the Islamabad government. Briefly, it appeared as if the Taliban's only secure relation-

[36] *Reuters*, 16 April, 2001.
[37] *VOA*, 25 May, 2001 and *Dawn*, 25 May, 2001.
[38] *Associated Press*, 29 June, 2001; *Voice of America*, 29 June, 2001; *VOA*, 17 August, 2001 and *Times of India*, 29 August, 2001.
[39] *AFP*, 10 August, 2001; *Boston Herald*, 24 August, 2001.
[40] *Reuters*, 13 September, 2001; *Dawn* 15 September, 2001.

ship with the outside world and the semblance of a standing in the international society of states which it made possible were to be sacrificed to the opportunities which a more fluid ethnic and tribal politics seemed to hold out.

Cooler heads quickly prevailed, however, with the announcement that Pakistan was sending a delegation to Kandahar with evidence for Mullah Omar to secure Bin Laden's extradition.[41] The embassy did not appear to be directly involved. Indeed, its own contribution resulted in a mis-step when a proposal for mediation by Jessie Jackson collapsed into an argument about whether the mission or Jackson had initiated the idea. This was followed by a well-reported snubbing of Zaeef by the new American ambassador at an official function, the willingness of both sides to give publicity to the non-contact being replete with intended political significances.[42] It transpired, however, that Zaeef was centrally involved in the Pakistani initiative, as he accompanied their delegation to participate in the negotiations. The visit resulted in a request from the Kandahar Council of Ulemas to Bin Laden that he should leave Afghanistan, but it was Zaeef who explained that the request was advisory and non-binding until Omar approved it. He did not, and the delegation returned to Pakistan with a promise to meet again and a request for OIC and UN investigations of the bombings.

Zaeef maintained that the talks had not been about Bin Laden but rather Afghani-Pakistani relations.[43] While others claimed that Bin Laden's fate was non-negotiable, however, it was he who signalled movement in the Taliban's position. On occasions he linked his customary call for evidence for a trial to the possibility that a 'handover' was an option and '. . . We want that if Osama Bin Laden is involved in this action . . .' Also it was Zaeef who revealed that, Omar's silence notwithstanding, the Ulema's recommendation that he should leave had been given to Bin Laden, but that there had been '. . . no response . . .'[44] Thus, Zaeef had suggested an alternative to a trial in Afghanistan and had suggested the possibility that some there wanted Bin Laden out of the country but could not make it happen. We do not know the extent to which these hints reflected the views of the government, and we do not know whether they were canards or genuine démarches. From a policy point of view these are critical questions, but the activity itself provides evidence of Zaeef, the diplomat, manoeuvring to create space both for his own government and others.

Even so, these were vague offers of dubious provenance and questionable weight. They suggested a mission which, in the absence of clear instructions and in the face of looming catastrophe, was beginning to make things up as it went along. There were no other substantive shifts. Discussions to broaden the base of the Taliban government, in which Zaeef participated, went nowhere. The mission attempted to orchestrate a high profile return of a British journalist while British Prime Minister Blair was in Islamabad on the brink of the bombing, but Blair did not meet with them. Zaeef said the aid workers would be freed if there was no bombing and repeated the possibility of a trial outside Afghanistan. None of these moves came

[41] *Dawn*, 17 September, 2001.
[42] Chamberlin asked photographers that she and Zaeef not appear in the same frame. Zaeef had declared before the function that he would attempt to talk to her, *The Guardian*, 28 September, 2001; *Fox News Channel*, 27 September, 2001 and *Reuters*, 27 September, 2001.
[43] *BBC News*, 28 September, 2001.
[44] *Dawn*, 21 September, 2001.

near meeting the demands of the other side, however, and the bombing commenced on 7–8 May.[45]

If Zaeef's scope for creativity on substantive matters was limited, however, this was not the case with the mission's public diplomacy. As the crisis deepened, so did media interest in the last remaining Taliban outpost, which responded by staging open-air press conferences, the popularity of which engendered requests for further background interviews. In one of the most extensive of these, Shaheen, like his ambassador, declared he had been drawn to the Taliban by outrage at the corruption of their predecessors and particularly by their sexual depredations of women and boys. He had served at the Taliban office in New York and, judging from the phone call he placed to Muttawakil during the interview, enjoyed the kind of access to his foreign minister which was unusual for a second secretary. The current tension between the Taliban and the US, he maintained, existed because of lack of trust on both sides fuelled by American charges that the Taliban were anti-democracy and that there were no human rights or women's rights in Afghanistan. The Taliban were also very worried what ordinary Muslims would think of them if they handed over '. . . a good Muslim, a mujahid . . .' like Bin Laden to America. He added, however, that the 'arrogance' which is part of Afghan culture had played a part in fuelling the tension.[46]

A theme in the media's coverage of the Taliban's diplomats was their ill-preparedness for dealing with the wider world, especially the press corps itself which included shaven men in shorts and women in tight jeans. Zaeef was reputed to have asked a local journalist what to say upon being told of the start of the bombing campaign and to have suffered from stage fright at his first press conference because of his uncertain English. At one point, Shaheen, voicing what all second secretaries must think on occasions but none dare say, requested no more press conferences so the embassy could get on with its work. Given that Zaeef had been in post for over a year, however, and Shaheen for even longer, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Taliban diplomats exercised more control than the media realised over the way they were presented. As figures of sympathy, their improbable claims about bombing casualties and military successes may have come under less scrutiny than otherwise and, indeed, the odious aspects of the regime they represented may have been more easily obscured by their image as the voices of the underdog in the war. Nevertheless, they also emerged as human beings, exotic but human nevertheless, attempting to engage the issues as these concerned their enemies, worrying about how good a job they were doing, and providing glimpses of what they thought about the constraints imposed by the priorities of their political masters and the sheer bloody awfulness of what was happening. Zaeef, for example, revealed something of a sense of humour and, on occasions, spoke philosophically about the need for superpowers to avoid violence and how the war would hurt both sides.[47] If this was the object of

[45] *Tasmanian Mercury*, 7 October, 2001 and *Dawn*, 5 October, 2001 quoting report in the *AIP*.

[46] Asra Q. Nomani, 'At Home With The Taliban' in *Salon.com* 10 October, 2001. Interview after bombing had begun.

[47] He maintained the Taliban did not even know what anthrax was, suggested that a country which was not in a position to make a glass could scarcely make atomic bombs, and said, '. . . America is enough for Afghanistan, there is no need for Australia to come . . .', <*Bloomberg.com*>, 20 October, 2001 and Preston Mendenhall, 'The Taliban's Reluctant Media Star', <*MSNBC.com/ news*>, 30 October, 2001. Other sources, *Courier Mail, Australia*, 24 October, 2001, *Associated Press*, 24 October, 2001, and *Washington Post*, 29 October, 2001.

their public diplomacy, then it was clearly a success. Much less clear was the extent to which the mission's proficiency in public diplomacy advanced either their own substantive interests or the general cause of peace.

Zaeef's war diplomacy

The onset of war, however, had given the Taliban diplomats more pressing things to worry about than the success or otherwise of their efforts to make themselves appear less strange. The cell phone system by which they communicated with Kabul and Kandahar had been rendered insecure by bombing, eavesdropping, and the possibility of attacks exploiting the signals themselves. Yet even though the ambassadors of the great powers were no longer talking directly with him, the practical and symbolic benefits of Zaeef's being the only Taliban with standing in the international society in time of war seem to have increased his stock with his political masters. They wanted him as a participant in, rather than just advisor to, their debates about the future. Thus, his second visit to Kandahar, by his own account merely to report and receive instructions, coincided with rumours of divisions in the leadership, Mutawakil's defection and his possible replacement by Zaeef.[48] The US had offered a halt in the bombing in return for Bin Laden, and UN representatives and Musharaff were reported as saying that there were '. . . decent people . . .' among the Taliban and that they were not all extremists.[49]

Zaeef himself appeared to be travelling the country seeking support for a response. After a prolonged return trip during which he reported on war damage (including a near-miss on himself) from within his own country, he arrived at the border saying he carried a cease-fire plan. The Pakistanis said they were ready to hear any plan, but had received none as yet and, shortly after, Zaeef retracted. There was no '. . . important message . . .' he said, there were no divisions in the leadership, and Bin Laden would not be handed over as this was '. . . an issue of faith . . .'[50] It remains difficult to know what had happened. Media reports at the time focused upon Zaeef's own mishandling of the procedural aspects of the episode. It seems likely, however, that he had secured agreement at home to his earlier suggestion that Bin Laden might be tried in another country if evidence was produced and the bombing stopped. If so, it is likely that the Pakistanis told him not to bother formally presenting the proposal as the Americans were not about to provide information about the evidence they had and their sources to people they regarded as enemies. It is also possible that Mullah Omar had changed his mind once Zaeef left.[51]

This was, however, Zaeef's first and last open attempt to bridge the gap between the belligerents. From this point, the substantive efforts of the mission were devoted to war diplomacy: rallying friends old and new and weakening the coalition of the enemy. In neither regard did Zaeef have many cards to play. He made his third

[48] *Gulf News*, 18 October, 2001.
[49] *Dawn*, 19 October, 2001.
[50] *Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)*, 19 October, 2001; *Gulf News*, 20 October, 2001.
[51] *Dawn*, 19 October, 2001.

confirmed visit to Kandahar at the end of October, ostensibly to obtain a request to the OIC to send a delegation to inspect bomb damage, but also to participate in more negotiations about how to broaden the Taliban's base of support. All he achieved, however, were talks with representatives of Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, a leader whose standing was as low as that of the Taliban's, about a territorial division of the country. Even the Pashtun tribesmen who had massed at the frontier to join the fight proved of little help. Zaeef asked them not to cross because they would only cause confusion and suffer casualties.[52] Even so, by the end of October, Zaeef's mission was still conducting a broad and relatively effective diplomacy on several fronts and multiple levels. In particular, the mission was able to report success in defensive battles around Mazar-i-Sharif and the capture of opponents who had re-entered the country. In early November Zaeef reported that all restrictions had been lifted on Bin Laden.[53]

Internationally, however, the Taliban's diplomatic position was under great pressure. The UN's Special Envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, refused to meet with Zaeef on a visit to Kabul when he met practically everyone else,[54] and a few days later, Zaeef was summoned to the Foreign Ministry to hear a request that he suspend his press conferences because of American complaints citing what the Pakistanis called a convention that a government should '. . . not use its embassy for the purpose of propaganda against any third country . . .' A day later, the Karachi consulate was closed because some of its staff had been involved in public demonstrations, although Musharaff made it clear that no break with the Taliban was anticipated, and the Americans had not requested the embassy be closed.[55] Then, a sudden and drastic decline in the military fortunes of the Taliban compounded this pressure. Masar fell around 9 November and Kabul less than a week later. The fall of the capital surprised everyone, including the Taliban ambassador who, until the last minute, had employed every diplomatic cliché in support of his government's fortunes on the battlefield. When the fall was confirmed, however, Zaeef departed on his final trip to Kandahar and, despite assurances that the mission was functioning normally (a photo opportunity was provided for the press to record the processing of visas), it appeared that the staff were packing.[56]

The much anticipated closure did not materialise. Zaeef participated in discussions at home at which the decision was taken to hang on in Kandahar and send him back to Islamabad, where his deputy was doing his best to justify the abandonment of Kabul on humanitarian grounds and claiming a role in the release of the aid workers.[57] More importantly, the Pakistan government had decided that it wanted the mission to remain open, the foreign minister offering a somewhat tortured explanation as to how, while it no longer conducted business with what was

[52] *Reuters*, 25 October, 2001, *IRNA*, 26 October, 2001, and *Dawn*, 29 October, 2001. It has been suggested that the volunteers were simply not trusted by the Taliban, *Asian Times*, 1 November, 2001.
[53] *IRNA*, 5 November, 2001.
[54] *VOA*, 29 October, 2001 and *Reuters*, 30 and 31 October, 2001.
[55] Aziz Khan, Foreign Ministry spokesman reported in *Dawn*, 8 November, 2001. <*Sunspot.com*> and 9 November, 2001.
[56] The Pakistanis provided Zaeef with an escort to and from the border, *The Guardian*, 14 and 15 November, 2001.
[57] *The Guardian*, 15 November, 2001 and *IRNA*, 16 November, 2001.

left of the Taliban government, it had not broken relations with them, and still regarded the mission as the embassy of Afghanistan.[58] The following day, the two remaining consulates were closed on the functional grounds that their documents would not be recognised in the adjacent Afghan territory. The embassy, it was reported, would be allowed to operate until an interim Afghan government had been established.[59]

This was a strange diplomatic half-life, reflecting the Pakistani hope that a measure of Taliban and, hence, Pakistani influence in the postwar government would be secured. What Zaeef would do with it, however, was less clear for the pace of developments was finally overwhelming his ability to make any sort of official sense of them. Two days later, following a direct request from the US, the Pakistanis finally decided to close the embassy. There is evidence this was done with reluctance but Musharraf had vetoed objections because of the need for relations with the new authorities in Kabul, where the Indians had already established a diplomatic presence. Staff would be given a 'reasonable time' consistent with diplomatic norms to pack up and leave.[60] The Americans welcomed this development. The Taliban's mission, according to Kenton Keith, the director of the new US information centre in Islamabad, had '. . . outlived its usefulness . . .' By this, he probably did not refer to its success in public diplomacy, although even Keith acknowledged that the US had '. . . to a certain extent . . . dropped the ball . . .' in this regard.[61] An older, more power-political reason for keeping lines of communication open had been foremost, the presence of hostages. With the release of the foreign aid workers, even this basic constraint on casting the Taliban out of international society had disappeared.

'I think we should go home'

A casting out is, however, sometimes harder to effect than might be supposed. So long as there was a Taliban, Zaeef perforce remained its accessible spokesman. Initially, the loss of his official standing allowed him to speak with more freedom and bravado. For example, he claimed that while the Taliban had no nuclear weapons, if they had they would surely have used them, and he declared there would be no negotiated settlement as '. . . Our leadership prefers death over humiliation . . .' and has '. . . advised and instructed everyone not to bow down in front of brutality and blasphemy . . .'[62] The Bonn peace process, he maintained, would solve nothing. The elections would be rigged to favour the Northern Alliance, the civil war would resume, and the Taliban would continue the struggle as they had in the past against '. . . the enemies of Islam . . .' The moment soon passed, however, with the announcement by the Taliban's deputy foreign minister that they did, after all, support the Bonn process and had reached agreement in principle with representatives of Karzai

[58] *Pittsburgh Post Gazetter News*, 19 November and *ABC <News.com>*, 19 November, 2001.
[59] *Reuters*, 20 November, 2001 and *Daily Star*, 21 November, 2001.
[60] *Washington Post*, 22 November and *Gulf News*, 23 November, 2001.
[61] *Boston Globe*, 21 November, 2001.
[62] *Times of India*, 1 and 4 December, 2001; *Los Angeles Times*, 5 December, 2001; and *Reuters*, 1 December, 2001.

for the handover of Kandahar.[63] It fell to Zaeef to present the Taliban view of the agreement. The town would be handed over to an intermediary leader, the fighters would disarm and Mullah Omar would be allowed to '. . . live with dignity . . .' The Taliban, Zaeef maintained, had done much for Afghanistan, '. . . in every Mosque, home and province there is a Talib . . .' but now, he concluded, '. . . I think we should go home . . .'[64]

At one level, Zaeef was merely reporting the details of a surrender which conformed to the requirements of Pakhtunwali and aabroh[65] by providing an acceptable third party to whom they could give up. At another, the statement reflected negotiations to preserve some measure of Taliban influence and, as such, continued to secure an impressive international audience. Donald Rumsfeld, the US defence secretary, quoted Zaeef's phrase '. . . live in dignity . . .' directly in rejecting any settlement which did not involve the surrender of the Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership.[66] This was, however, Zaeef's diplomatic high point. A few days later, he was denied entrance by police to a madressah where he was to address the students. The government declared the grace period for his mission was up, and he applied for political asylum.[67] There remained one brief and extraordinary episode. In a move worthy of Talleyrand, Zaeef claimed a relationship with Karzai, the man whom a few days earlier he had called '. . . the doll . . .' of the Northern Alliance, confirmed that he had become increasingly frustrated with the rigidity of his political masters, and let it be known that he was willing to serve as the ambassador of the new administration in Kabul.[68] The latter showed no interest. The Pakistanis denied his request for asylum and escorted him to the border where he was arrested and turned over to the Americans. Zaeef's last public statement, for now, was reported as '. . . I am not a criminal. I have committed no offence. I only performed my duties as a diplomat . . .'[69]

Conclusions

If these were, indeed, Zaeef's final words, then they point to a remarkable transition and are a tribute to the socialising power of what has been called the intrinsically 'liberal pedigree' of the culture of modern diplomacy.[70] After less than two years in the company of those professionally committed to finding a way to talk to each other through the exercise of reason and the application of everyday civilities and small acts of humanity, this is how the former guerrilla and, presumably, still committed Pashtun Islamicist chose to define himself. Whether he did so on no more

[63] *Dawn*, 6 December, 2001.
[64] *Dawn* and *Reuters*, December 6, *Reuters*, 7 December, and *Times of India*, 6 December, 2001.
[65] *Washington Post*, 29 October, 2001. Pakhtunwali signifies a tribal code of honour and honourable behaviour. Aabroh signifies a notion of face-saving.
[66] *Times of India*, 7 December, 2001.
[67] *Dawn*, 10 December, 2001.
[68] *Reuters*, 5 December, 2001 and *Boston Globe*, 12 December, 2001.
[69] *Dawn*, 25 and 30 December, 2001, *Times of India*, 4 January, 2002.
[70] Maurice Keens Soper, 'The Liberal Pedigree of Diplomacy', British Committee on the Theory of International Politics paper, 1974, in Herbert Butterfield File 332, Cambridge University Library.

than prudential grounds does not matter. There is no reason to believe that Zaeef had '. . . gone native . . .' in the sense that he had abandoned those he represented for the attractions, both shallow and profound, of the international society in which he found himself an ambassador. However, there is considerable evidence, from the reported frustrations he experienced with the immobility of his leaders to his signalling colleagues about how they might best approach his leaders if they were to have any prospect of success, that Zaeef was acquiring, or learning how to put into practice on behalf of his cause, that certain flexibility of mind necessary for, and encouraged by, working with his colleagues.

That these measures, particularly the belated attempt to pursue an Islamic route to putting Bin Laden on trial in a third country, did not succeed is attributable to the fact that at least one, and probably both, the principal parties to the conflict did not want a peaceful outcome on terms short of what they could regard as a victory. Wherever the balance of responsibility is placed in this regard, however, the common point is the weakness of diplomats once political leaders are knowingly committed to courses of action which will lead to an eruption. Their culture can keep the diplomats together through major shocks, but not always those they represent. Like the scar tissue growing back over a puncture wound, however, diplomatic activity constantly seeks to establish the new grounds on which conversations can be resumed and continued so as to provide opportunities which political leaders, with the benefits of experience and advice, may be more inclined to take in the future. This is a difficult and often unpopular task even on behalf of antagonists who share a common understanding of the international society of which they are members and differ only on the specific application and interpretation of its rules, or in their interests. One can only anticipate it becoming harder as globalisation brings about encounters between those who see themselves occupying different moral universes first and international society second, and who believe, for either material or ideological reasons, that they need not, or ought not to, compromise with those whom they regard as wicked.

If the Afghan conflict is viewed as such an encounter, however, as opposed to merely the punishment of brigands after an initial parlay, then the efforts of Mullah Zaeef to '. . . become diplomatic . . .' and of his Islamabad colleagues to accommodate his efforts provide grounds for modest optimism, for they suggest that the obstacles to resolving transcultural conflict in the future are not necessarily insurmountable. The specific character of the present international society may be changing and making intersubjective understandings more difficult to achieve, but the efforts of Mullah Zaeef and his colleagues to find a way of talking to each other and keeping the conversation going suggest that the underlying human sociability which fuels diplomacy remains very much in evidence. If this is so, the challenge is to discover in what sorts of circumstances the values of the diplomatic culture can be imported back into the wider international society culture of those whom the diplomats represent, and how those circumstances, once identified, may be fostered and encouraged.