

American policy and that the Holy Quran clearly says it is wrong to kill. Our people see conspiracies behind everything, and many argued that the attack was actually carried out by Jews as an excuse for America to launch a war on the Muslim world. Some of our newspapers printed stories that no Jews went to work at the World Trade Center that day. My father said this was rubbish.

Musharraf told our people that he had no choice but to cooperate with the Americans. He said they had told him, 'Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,' and threatened to 'bomb us back to the Stone Age' if we stood against them. But we weren't exactly cooperating as the ISI was still arming Taliban fighters and giving their leaders sanctuary in Quetta. They even persuaded the Americans to let them fly hundreds of Pakistani fighters out of northern Afghanistan. The ISI chief asked the Americans to hold off their attack on Afghanistan until he had gone to Kandahar to ask the Taliban leader Mullah Omar to hand over bin Laden; instead he offered the Taliban help.

In our province Maulana Sufi Mohammad, who had fought in Afghanistan against the Russians, issued a fatwa against the US. He held a big meeting in Malakand, where our ancestors had fought the British. The Pakistani government didn't stop him. The governor of our province issued a statement that anyone who wanted to fight in Afghanistan against NATO forces was free to do so. Some 12,000 young men from Swat went to help the Taliban. Many never came back. They were most likely killed, but as there is no proof of death, their wives can't be declared widows. It's very hard on them. My father's close friend Wahid Zaman's brother and brother-in-law were among the many who went to Afghanistan. Their wives and children are still waiting for them. I remember visiting them and feeling their longing. Even so, it all seemed far, far away from our peaceful garden valley. Afghanistan is less than a hundred miles away, but to get there you have to go through Bajaur, one of the tribal areas between Pakistan and the border with Afghanistan.

Bin Laden and his men fled to the White Mountains of Tora Bora in eastern Afghanistan, where he had built a network of tunnels while fighting the Russians. They escaped through these and over the mountains into Kurram, another tribal agency. What we didn't know then was that bin Laden came to Swat and stayed in a remote village for a year, taking advantage of the *Pashtunwali* hospitality code.

Anyone could see that Musharraf was double-dealing, taking American money while still helping the jihadis – 'strategic assets', as the ISI calls them. The Americans say they gave Pakistan billions of dollars to help their campaign against al-Qaeda but we didn't see a single cent. Musharraf built a mansion by Rawal Lake in Islamabad and bought an apartment in London. Every so often an important American official would complain that we weren't doing enough and then suddenly some big fish would be caught. Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, the mastermind of 9/11, was found in a house just a mile from the army chief's official residence in Rawalpindi. But President Bush kept praising Musharraf, inviting him to Washington and calling him his buddy. My father and his friends were disgusted. They said the Americans always preferred dealing with dictators in Pakistan.

From an early age I was interested in politics and sat on my father's knee listening to everything he and his friends discussed. But I was more concerned with matters closer to home – our own street to be exact. I told my friends at school about the rubbish-dump children and that we should help. Not everyone wanted to as they said the children were dirty and probably diseased, and their parents would not like them going to school with children like that. They also said it wasn't up to us to sort out the problem. I didn't agree. 'We can sit by and hope the government will help but they won't. If I can help support one or two children and another family supports one or two then between us we can help them all.'