

# AFGHANISTAN

## A Nation of Minorities

A MINORITY RIGHTS GROUPS INTERNATIONAL REPORT • 92/2 • AFGHANISTAN: A NATION OF MINORITIES

# THE MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP

is an international research and information unit registered in Britain as an educational charity under the Charities Act of 1960. Its principal aims are –

To secure justice for minority or majority groups suffering discrimination, by investigating their situation and publicising the facts as widely as possible, to educate and alert public opinion throughout the world.

To help prevent, through publicity about violations of human rights, such problems from developing into dangerous and destructive conflicts which, when polarised, are very difficult to resolve; and

To foster, by its research findings, international understanding of the factors which create prejudiced treatment and group tensions, thus helping to promote the growth of a world conscience regarding human rights.

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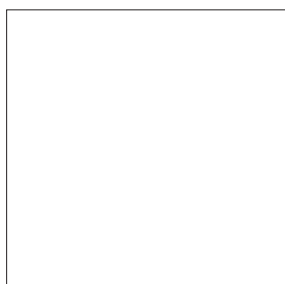
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Widow in Afghan  
refugee camp, 1988  
JENNY MATTHEWS/REX FEATURES

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# AFGHANISTAN A Nation of Minorities

BY NASSIM JAWAD

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# UNITED NATIONS COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS 1966

## Article 27

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

## GENEVA CONVENTION RELATIVE TO THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIAN PERSONS IN TIME OF WAR, 1949

### Article 16

The wounded and sick, as well as the infirm, and expectant mothers, shall be the object of particular protection and respect.

### Article 17

The Parties to the conflict shall endeavour to conclude local agreements for the removal from besieged or encircled areas, of wounded, sick, infirm and aged persons, children and maternity cases, and for the passage of ministers of all religions, medical personnel and medical equipment on their way to such areas.

### Article 18

Civilian hospitals organized to give care to the wounded and sick, the infirm and maternity cases, may in no circumstances be the object of attack, but at all times be respected and protected by the parties to that conflict.

### Article 21

Convoys of vehicles... conveying wounded or sick civilians, the infirm or maternity cases, shall be respected and protected in the same manner as the hospitals provided for in Article 18...

### Article 24

The Parties to the conflict shall take the necessary measures to ensure that children under fifteen, who are orphaned or separated as a result of the war, are not left to their own resources, and that their maintenance, their exercise of their religion, and their education are facilitated in all circumstances.

## UNIVERSAL ISLAMIC DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, 1981

### X Rights of Minorities

(a) The Qur'anic principle, 'There is no compulsion in religion' shall govern the religious rights of non-Muslim minorities.

(b) In a Muslim country, religious minorities shall have the choice to be governed in respect of their civil and personal matters by Islamic law, or by their own laws.

## INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, 1966

### Article 1

1. In this Convention, the term 'racial discrimination' shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

4. Special measures taken for the sole purpose of securing adequate advancement of certain racial or ethnic groups or individuals requiring such protection as may be necessary in order to ensure such groups or individuals equal enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms shall not be deemed racial discrimination, provided, however, that such measures do not, as a consequence, lead to the maintenance of separate rights for different racial groups and that they shall not be continued after the objectives for which they were taken have been achieved.

### Article 2

2. States parties shall, when the circumstances so warrant, take, in the social, economic, cultural and other fields, special and concrete measures to ensure the adequate development and protection of certain racial groups or individuals belonging to them, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. These measures shall in no case entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate rights for different racial groups after the objectives for which they were taken have been achieved.

# PREFACE

**Afghanistan has experienced over a decade of warfare, which has destroyed villages, cities, pastures, livestock, implements, infrastructure and, above all, its people. Five million people have become refugees, over a million people have been killed and perhaps 300,000 are permanently disabled as a direct result of the war. Some of its causes lie within Afghanistan, but its scale and intensity is the result of intervention by outside powers, guided by blind ideology or strategic interest, disregarding the wishes and needs of the Afghan people. Today there is a real chance of success for a UN-brokered peace in Afghanistan. Such a peace is desperately sought by most Afghans, whether inside or outside the country.**

This report is unusual in that, unlike most of MRG's Reports, it does not concentrate upon a particular minority, but upon a state which contains many diverse peoples. Nor is it a case where warfare between ethnic or religious groups, such as happened in Uganda or Lebanon, is the main cause of conflict. The largest ethnic group, the Pashtuns, who before 1979 dominated the government and administration, were a dominant minority; but, while this was a source of tension, it did not cause the war. Those groups who faced discrimination previously, such as the Shia Muslims, also found the same discrimination existed within the Mujahedin. In Afghanistan the conflicts were primarily political, not ethnic and religious, and were fuelled by superpower politics.

Unlike her neighbours to the east and north, conquered by the British and Russian Empires respectively, Afghanistan had fought for, and retained, its independence. This precarious independence was undermined in the Cold War era by the competing power blocs of the USA and the USSR, each promoting its own interests and ideology. This report traces the consequences of the Cold War politics of the superpowers and the increasing involvement of the ambitious regional powers, principally Pakistan and Iran, in Afghanistan's internal affairs, and the fatal consequences of that involvement.

Some of the following story is already well known – the Soviet invasion of 1979, the long war of attrition that followed between the Soviet-held cities and the resistance-held countryside, the flight of millions of refugees into Pakistan and Iran, the violation of human rights and the devastation of a nation. Yet as the Cold War draws to its end, Afghanistan runs the risk of being forgotten by the world.

Most analysis on Afghanistan has been written from a biased and now outdated Cold War viewpoint, seeing Afghanistan only as a minor player in the superpower game rather than in human terms. This report is principally about the peoples of Afghanistan, how war and power politics have affected their lives, and their prospects for the future.

The author, Nassim Jawad, is in an unique position to understand this complex situation. He is an Afghan from a minority community, the Shia Qizilbash from Kabul, who has himself experienced minority discrimination. He was educated in Afghanistan and later in Austria. Like many educated urban Afghans, he was involved in the new political reform movements of the 1960s.

After the Soviet invasion, he began relief work with the Afghan refugees in Pakistan. To succeed in his task, he had to relearn Afghan ways, to reintegrate himself into an Afghan community, which had been deeply traumatized by its experiences. It was a hard task, but he survived and gained the confidence of the community. For 10 years he worked in partnership with European development agencies, not only with Afghan communities in the camps but also in resistance-held areas inside Afghanistan. He left Pakistan only in 1990 after receiving threats from fundamentalist groups based there. He is now completing a book on the politics of aid in the Afghan conflict.

Nassim Jawad is thus simultaneously both an insider and an outsider. In this report he condemns outside intervention in Afghanistan's affairs, whether it comes from the USSR, the USA, Pakistan, Iran or the Gulf States. He writes scathingly of the brutal attempt to Sovietize Afghanistan's society and culture, but also of fundamentalist harassment and persecution of opponents in the refugee camps. He understands the plight of the millions of refugees living as exiles, but deplores the political motivation behind the distribution of aid, the exclusion of qualified Afghans from decision-making, and the growth and perpetuation of a dependency culture in the camps. He shows special concern for the most vulnerable groups – women, children, the elderly and disabled.

Nor is Nassim Jawad's viewpoint a totally pessimistic one. He sees hope for a future peaceful Afghanistan, through the new skills and perspectives gained during the last decade and by the growth of genuine grassroots democracy in areas free from both the former Soviet-backed government and the Western-backed and fundamentalist Mujahedin.

Nevertheless, even if peace is achieved, Afghanistan will carry a heavy burden for many years. The five million Afghans who have been forced into exile will need considerable amounts of outside material assistance if they are to be resettled and the shattered economy is to be rebuilt. It is essential that such aid should be given generously, appropriately, and without political strings and political bias.

The United Nations can play a vital co-ordinating role. But both the USA and the former USSR must shoulder a large share of the blame for the destruction of the Afghan nation. Both must lend their political backing to any UN peace plan, their financial support for a reconstruction programme – and then keep out and let the Afghans rebuild their lives in the way they choose, free from external interference.

**Alan Phillips** Executive Director  
*February 1992*

## GLOSSARY

of terms used in this report

Abbreviations and terms from Afghan and other languages

<b>AIG</b>	Afghan Interim Government
<b>Amir</b>	King
<b>Izzat</b>	lit. 'honour' (collective and individual)
<b>Jihad</b>	Islamic holy war
<b>Jirga</b>	Pashtun (Pathan) tribal assembly for resolution of disputes and decision-making
<b>KHAD</b>	Afghan secret police
<b>Khalq</b>	lit. 'people', one of two main factions of the PDPA
<b>Khan</b>	lord, chief, traditional leader
<b>Koochi</b>	nomads
<b>Loya Jirga</b>	lit. 'grand assembly'
<b>Madrasahs</b>	Islamic religious schools
<b>Malik</b>	village leader, government representative
<b>Mujahedin</b>	lit. 'soldiers of god', collective name for groups fighting against Kabul government and USSR military
<b>Mullah</b>	Islamic religious leaders
<b>Parcham</b>	lit. 'flag', one of the two main factions of the PDPA
<b>Pashtunistan</b>	political movement advocating creation of a separate Pashtun (Pathan) state
<b>Pastunwali</b> (or <b>Pukhtunwali</b> )	traditional code of conduct in Pashtun (Pathan) society
<b>PDPA</b>	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
<b>Purdah</b>	maintenance of female seclusion
<b>Sharia</b>	code of Islamic law

## AFGHANISTAN IN OUTLINE

Afghanistan lies in the heart of Asia. Its geographical situation makes it a country of immense strategic importance in the region. Throughout its history, Afghanistan has thus been subject to continual invasion and rule by outside powers – Greeks, Mongols, Turks, Uzbeks and other empires. One authority, Anthony Hyman, rightly asserts that in order to understand Afghanistan and its people, one has to refer to the three great regions of Asia with which Afghanistan shares common borders – Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East. Afghanistan is in some way related to each, and yet remains distinct.<sup>1</sup>

A country slightly larger than such European countries as France or Spain, Afghanistan occupies 650,000 sq. km of mountainous territory in Central Asia. Entirely landlocked, Afghanistan borders on Iran in the west, Pakistan in the south and east, China in the far north-east, and the USSR in the north.

Much of Afghanistan consists of highland plains and plateaus, separated by mountain ranges, the major range being the Hindu Kush in the north-east which converges on the Himalayan Pamir. The subsidiary ranges of the Hindu Kush – the Kuh-e Baba, the Band-e Torkestan and the Safed Koh – extend westwards. The valleys and lowlands are sometimes dry and rocky but many are fertile and capable of supporting agricultural and urban populations – most of the cities are in the eastern valleys. The south-west is largely waterless desert.

### Population estimates

There are no accurate population figures available. A number of international agencies, such as the United Nations (UN), have attempted in the past to count the population. The lack of infrastructure made access to vast parts of the country impossible, so the attempt was aborted. Since that time, continuing warfare has further complicated the issue. However, a current population estimate is that it stands between 15 and 18 million. In the 1970s, the population growth rate was 2.3%.

The national capital, Kabul, had a population of approximately 700,000 in 1978. It is the largest city in the country and is now thought to contain over one million people. The towns of Herat, Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif are regional capitals and also have significant populations.

In the 1970s, life expectancy was among the lowest in Asia – 36.5 years for men and 37.8 years for women. Only 50 out of every 100 children survived beyond the age of five (compared to 96 in 100 in the UK). One result of the consequent low rate of population growth was that Afghanistan did not suffer the grinding poverty which characterized other countries in the subcontinent. There were few reports of extreme malnutrition.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless there was a high incidence of respiratory diseases and health facilities were minimal.



## The Afghan state

For the past two centuries Afghanistan's foreign policy has always been dictated by its position as a buffer zone – geographically between the British Empire and the Russian Tsars in the 19th and early 20th century, and ideologically between the USA and the USSR during the Cold War period. Its political and economic development throughout this period can be seen in this context.

Its internal policy, on the other hand, has been dictated by the Pashtuns – a 'dominant minority' comprising up to an estimated 40% of the total population. The Pashtuns have dominated the remaining 60% of the population, henceforward referred to in this report as 'minorities'.

The population of Afghanistan is ethnically and linguistically diverse. George Arney describes it as 'an anthropologist's nightmare'.<sup>3</sup> Prior to 1978, little progress had been made towards a nation-state. Only a very small number of the educated elite spoke in terms of a single identifiable Afghan nationality. Even within that small group, if they were asked their nationality by foreigners when travelling abroad, individuals defined themselves according to their ethnic group, rather than by nationality. Kinship, tribalism and regional independence prevailed. Even today, few Afghans think of themselves as 'Afghan' – a term originally confined to the Pashtuns.

## Religion

Islam was introduced into Afghanistan in the 8th Century. It is the country's single binding force. The only non-Muslims belong to a tiny Sikh and Hindu minority, plus a few Jewish families. The majority of the population profess Sunni Islam. A significant minority, including the Hazaras in central Afghanistan and some non-Hazara people of Herat province near the Iranian frontier, as well as some in Kabul, profess Shi'a Islam. There is a small group of people in the north which follows the Ismaili sect of Islam.

The role of Islam within Afghanistan differs according to the traditional culture of each ethnic group. The Pashtuns, for instance, believe they are 'more Pashtun than Muslim' and have their own code of conduct, *Pashtunwali* (or *Pukhtunwali*). In many respects Islam appears to stand in direct contradiction to their traditional social and political structure. As one Pashtun told the author recently, 'You cannot be a good Pashtun and a good Muslim at the same time.'

Ashraf Ghani, an Afghan anthropological scholar, describes the role of Islam as follows:

*'On the relation between Islam and state and society in Afghanistan, three points need to be emphasized. First, Islam has provided the source of unity for Afghan society and the criteria of legitimacy for the Afghan state. Its role can be seen clearly during the wars against the British invaders in the 19th Century and the Soviet invaders in the 20th Century. Second, despite the pivotal position of Islam, state power in Afghanistan has never been*

*exercised by religious specialists and leaders. Third, inquisition based on adherence to certain arbitrarily designated orthodox beliefs has not been part of the past of the Afghans.'*<sup>4</sup>

## Languages

Pashtu (as spoken by the Pashtuns) and the Persian dialect of Dari are the country's national languages. Aside from these, Afghanistan has some 20 main languages and numerous other dialects. Jadwiga Pstrusinska, who carried out a study of the different languages in Afghanistan, reports that there are at least 45 different languages spoken in Afghanistan:

*'...in pre-war Afghanistan there were between 40 and 50 languages – some exclusive to the country – belonging to seven large, separate groups within four linguistic groups. It is, however, important to notice that linguistic divisions do not fully overlap with ethnic ones. Except for Dari, Pashtu and Arabic, almost all the other languages have no written form. In many cases it is questionable as to whether we talk of a dialect or a separate language.'*<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the languages mentioned above, Baluchi and Uzbeki also have written forms. The Pstrusinska study reports that nine out of the 45 languages spoken in the far northern province of Badakhshan are also spoken elsewhere in Afghanistan.

In 1987 and 1988, the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) attempted to create alphabets and uniform grammar for some of the minority languages. Nuristani and Pashai – both spoken in the far east of the country – were among these. The attempt failed, basically because of a lack of understanding of the diversity of the languages. In Nuristan alone, five different languages are spoken. Soviet experts and other government advisors failed to gain the active involvement of the people whose tongue they were transcribing.

## Economy

Economically, Afghanistan remains a pre-industrial society. Prior to the Soviet invasion, mining and manufacturing were marginal activities, with coal, natural gas, textiles and cement production employing only very small numbers of the workforce. During the oil boom of the 1970s, some Afghans worked in the Gulf States.

Before the Soviet invasion, approximately 85% of the population lived in rural areas, and derived their livelihood from agriculture and animal husbandry. The majority of the farmers were deeply indebted to their landlords, to wealthy merchants, to rich nomads and to corrupt magistrates. A high percentage of the farmers had to till the soil

for landowners on a share-crop basis for only 20% to 40% of the harvest.

The workers' remuneration depended on the condition of the soil and the amount of labour and material they contributed. Contributions included the repair of water channels after heavy floods, and provision of oxen and draught animals for ploughing and harvesting. In many cases at least one member of the family had to work outside his village in order to earn enough additional income to enable the family to survive.

Handicraft was another source of income, employing significant numbers of people in the rural areas. It was also the only one, apart from agriculture and animal husbandry, in which women were active. Most of the products were produced for the workers' own consumption, but some for the local market. Goods would be bartered in exchange for other commodities which could not be produced by themselves, such as sugar, salt, and kerosene. Handicrafts also found a large market in Western countries in 1970s.

The state remained the largest single employer:

*'...the state employed some 90,000 civil servants, and 50,000 more in education and health. The armed forces accounted for 80,000 in the army (mostly land conscripts) and 10,000 more in the air force.'*<sup>76</sup>

The few cities of Afghanistan exert very little influence over the people living in the rural areas. The disparity between town and village is great. Thus, despite the great numbers employed by the state, it makes little sense to talk of a state-run country, but rather one where the tribal system, reinforced by Islamic religious belief, maintains an inward-looking society.

## Society

Afghan society is one of the most complex societies among existing tribal systems in the world. Not only is it divided into different ethnic groups, but each ethnic group is again divided into sub-tribes. The Pashtuns are a prime example of this social complexity. Sir Henry Rawlinson, writing from British India in 1875, described Afghan society as follows:

*'The nation consists of a mere collection of tribes, of unequal power and with divergent habits, which are held together, more or less closely, according to the personal character of the chief who rules them. The feeling of patriotism, as known in Europe, cannot exist among the Afghans, for there is no common country. In its place is found a strong, turbulent love of individual liberty, which naturally rebels against authority, and would be equally impatient of control, whether exercised by English or Russians or Persians, or even Duranis.'*<sup>77</sup>

The social structure of Afghanistan can be defined as an agrarian society with clientelism. It worked as follows. The majority of land was owned by *Khans* (lords) who held positions somewhat similar to those of the semi-feudal aristocracy in Europe. They commanded respect from their farmer tenants and took on responsibility for the people living within their domain. The indebtedness of farmers, who remained grateful for the lease system, allowed the rich to represent their villages at all levels, which included state and other institutions. For their part, the landowners bore and honoured a responsibility toward villagers which extended to their economic well-being in times of need. Thus a system of reciprocal obligation was maintained.

Although the state had overall responsibility for Afghanistan's institutions – such as foreign policy, the armed forces, and communication systems – the traditional structure of rural society remained untouched. A recurrent example of the limitations of state power was always demonstrated in the government's attempts to collect taxes. This procedure frequently ended up in a rebellion of the rural population. Their opposition was supported by their leaders, and the government had to compromise. As a result all judicial, educational, public and social services remained the sole responsibility of the villagers themselves.

From the late 19th Century onwards, governments made attempts to reform and develop the country. Their underlying aim was to extend their own influence and power beyond the borders of Kabul into other provinces – and preferably into the rural areas. These attempts always failed because of the lack of resources and of sufficient numbers of capable technical and administrative staff. More importantly, governments consistently failed to gain the confidence of rural people by ignoring their role in their own development and by failing to consult with them on issues of importance.

A tiny educated urban elite, deeply influenced by Western concepts of secularism and progress, has emerged in the last 50 years. This was concentrated in the capital, Kabul. Influenced by the 1960s political movements in the West, the small educated elite organized itself into Western-style political parties in their search for an answer to progress and modernization. Some were based on a secular ideal, others on Islam. In 1965, the first political parties (Marxist, Nationalist, Liberal and radical Islamist) were established and took part in the first 'free elections'.

## Women

The role and status of women in Afghanistan varies with their ethnic group, their social and economic position, and whether they live in a rural or urban area.

Women belonging to the tribal society of Afghanistan have a difficult position. On the one hand, they are an important part of the code of honour which, together with Islamic law, enforces many restrictions on them. This means that in practice, as a means of 'protection', women are segregated from all important political and social decisions which lie outside the walls of their homes, although Pashtun men might consult wives or sisters before going to discuss local affairs.



On the other hand, women have always been active contributors to the family economy in their homes and villages. Outside their homes, they fetch water or pick cotton. In Nuristan, women do almost all the agricultural work. Produce from agriculture, animal husbandry, and numerous handicrafts contribute to the family purse, either through direct consumption or through sale for profit.

Women in the educated urban elite enjoyed greater freedom and began to form a substantial part of the workforce. They found roles primarily in government service (especially education) but also in private business. Kabul University became co-educational, and an increasing number of girls from the provinces came to study there in the 1970s.

## Education and Health

According to the Afghan constitution, education is compulsory and free. However, in reality the nation has never had the human, material, and financial resources to implement universal education. By 1965, most towns had a modern government-run school with a salaried teacher. In addition, there existed some religious schools (*madrassas*) in the rural areas, where religious figures (*mullahs*) were responsible for the tuition. Most of the mullahs were illiterate themselves, so learning was often confined to memorizing the Koran.

By 1978, Afghanistan's literacy rate was still below 10%. Although many schools had been built in the villages (often by the villagers themselves), many remained empty or were used as stores and other public centres, because of the lack of textbooks, teachers and other resources.

Kabul University was founded in 1921. In 1964, all the faculties came together in a single campus area, west of Kabul. All faculties were affiliated to one or another university in western Europe or the USA – with the exception of the Polytechnic, which was built and run by the USSR. The university inevitably suffered from the events of 1978. Curricula were changed, and staff members harassed. By 1984, the number of students had been reduced from 14,000 to 6,000.

Modern health facilities, hospitals, and clinics were limited to major cities and towns. With approximately 1300 doctors, and even fewer nurses in 1978, health facilities rarely reached the rural population. Afghanistan remained heavily reliant on foreign aid for its health care – the USSR, Japan, India, the USA and Britain-sponsored teams whose activities were also largely limited to major cities and towns.



## PEOPLES OF AFGHANISTAN

A Swiss scholar, Pierre Centlivres, describes the ethnic complexity of Afghanistan as follows:

*'One of the first geographic maps of Afghanistan, a Soviet one, published in 1955 in 'Sovetskaja Etnografya' shows 16 ethnic groups in Afghanistan. One of the most recent ones, published in Tuebingen, lists 57 ethnic names. The Kabul regime, however, announced recently the existence of eight nationalities.'*<sup>78</sup>

A continuing theme has been the dominance of the Pashtun ethnic groups, particularly from 1747 when Ahmad Shah Durani was chosen as their leader. Afghanistan has been ruled by one or another Pashtun tribe since that time. The Pashtun rulers of Afghanistan have tried to pursue the ideal of national unity, and inevitably failed, because their primary aim has always been the extension of their power. The constitutions of 1964 and 1977 both state that every member of the country is called 'Afghan' – a name which among the Afghans themselves is used for the dominant group of Pashtuns.

In fact, during the periods of monarchy as well as in the times of Daoud's republic:

*'The Pashtunisation of the country was part of the programme of the state. Therefore any numerical relationship and the balance of power between the different ethnic groups in Afghanistan has been always altered, without any doubt, to promote the Pashtun interest.'*<sup>79</sup>

## The major ethnic groups

Because of the absence of reliable census figures for Afghanistan, it is not possible to give exact or reliable figures for the various ethnic and other major groups. All the figures given below are the author's own and are based upon estimates put forward by scholars in a variety of fields. Afghan official figures tend to promote Pashtuns as the single major group and to underestimate the numbers of other groups, who can then be regarded as minorities.

### Pashtuns

Pashtuns are seen as the historic founders of the Afghan kingdom. They are Sunni Muslim and their language, Pashtu, is related to the Indo-European family – Iranian group. Twelve million Pashtuns also live in Pakistan, where they are known to other ethnic groups, and in Anglo-Indian literature, as Pathans.

Before 1978, Pashtuns made up approximately 40% of the population, living mainly in the east and south of the

Ethnic groups maps

country adjacent to Pakistan, although there were groups of Pashtuns in most parts of the country, implanted by Amir Abdul Rahman Khan in the late 19th Century. But some 85% of over three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan are Pashtuns, while according to research carried out with the help of the Gallup Institute in late 1987, Pashtuns were then only 13% of the population remaining inside Afghanistan.

The social structure of the Pashtuns is based on the Pashtunwali (or Pukhtunwali) code. This requires the speaking of Pashtu and adherence to a number of established customs. Hospitality remains high on the agenda. So too does a reliance on the tribal council (*jirga*) for the resolution of disputes and local decision-making, and the enforcement of women's seclusion from all affairs outside their houses. An important part of the Pashtunwali code is personal authority and freedom. Political leadership is based on personalities rather than structures and ideologies.

The following poem by Hanzala of Badghis, who lived in Nishapur during the first half of the 9th Century AD in the court of a Tahirid ruler, expresses a central theme in Pashtun culture:

*If leadership rests inside the lion's jaw,  
So be it. Go, snatch it from his jaw.  
Your lot shall be greatness, prestige, honor and  
glory.  
If all fails, face death like a man.<sup>10</sup>*

(translated by S. Shpoon, an Afghan scholar and poet)

It is perhaps the power and leadership of individuals that divides the Pashtuns not only into different tribes, but also into numerous sub-tribes – each isolated within its own boundaries. Interference in each other's internal affairs has caused conflicts among the different sub-tribes throughout history. Yet any external interference – Russian, British, Soviet – and interference by the central government has resulted in immediate unity.

Despite their dominant position in the state, Pashtuns do not form a homogenous group which supports without question the aims and policies of their rulers. Indeed, many fell victim to the oppression of their own elite group which governed them.

Economically the majority of Pashtuns survive on agriculture and animal husbandry, with some involved in trade. A significant number of people work outside their villages, with Pakistan being the main centre for the majority of their workforce.

## Tajiks

The most common estimate for Tajiks is that they form about 30% of the population. More precise figures maintain that before 1978 Tajiks had been about 25% of the population. However, they comprise only about 6% of the refugees and because of the Pashtun exodus, they are now

perhaps slightly more than one third of the population. They predominate in the north-east and in the west, and some reside in the capital, Kabul.

Most are Sunni Muslim, but Shia Muslim Tajiks are also to be found in the west (around and in the city of Herat), and in Kabul. Their language is Persian, distinguished only by accent from the national language of Iran. Indeed, Tajiks are of central Asian Iranian origin. Almost four million Tajiks also live in Soviet Central Asia, concentrated in the Tadjikistan Republic.

Because they make up the bulk of the educated elite and possess considerable wealth, particularly in Kabul and Herat, they have significant political influence. Their influence lies predominantly in the government ministries, public services, and trade bodies.

Unlike the Pashtuns, there is no specific Tajik social structure. They are divided between the north, the west and Kabul, and have adopted the social and cultural patterns of their neighbours. For example, Heratis have been influenced by Iran, those living in the north by the Tajiks in central Asia, and the urban dwellers by native Kabulis.

## Hazaras

About 10% of the population before 1978 and about 16% today, Hazaras live mainly in the central highlands. They follow the Shia confession and use the Farsi lingua franca, with some everyday words remaining from their earlier language. These match words in the Kirghiz language, and linguistic study has shown the Hazaras, like the Kirghiz of the Pamirs whom they resemble physically, to be of Eastern Turkic and not, as had previously been thought, to be of Mongol origin. Hazaras settled in Afghanistan at least as far back as the 13th Century.

Hazaras have always lived on the edge of economic survival. From the 1880s onwards, and particularly during the reign of Amir Abdul Rahman, they suffered severe political, social, and economic repression. As the Pashtun Amir started to extend his influence from Kabul to other parts of the country by force, the Hazaras were the first ethnic group to revolt against his expansionism. Pashtun tribes were sent to the central highlands to crush the revolt. As a result, thousands of Hazara men were killed, women and children were taken as slaves, and their land was occupied.

In order to strengthen the forces against the Hazara rebellion, the Amir played on Sunni religious sensibilities and even attracted Tajiks and Uzbeks (both Sunnis) to help the Pashtuns against the Shia Hazaras. Those who survived the initial period of the raids managed to escape to the north. A number fled to British India. Today, the Hazaras make up a significant and influential ethnic group in the Pakistani town of Quetta. The present Governor of Baluchistan, General Mohammad Mussa, belongs to the Hazara ethnic group.

Having lost most of their fertile land to the Pashtuns during this period, and to the nomads in later stages, they were forced to occupy the dry mountains of the central highlands. Many Hazara males migrated to major cities and towns, particularly Kabul and later to Iran and Pakistan, where they made up the bulk of unskilled

labour. Those who migrated with their families saw their wives working as servants in the houses of middle-class Kabulis for minimum wages. Their thrift and industry have enabled Hazaras to establish a very strong position in the transport industry.

It was perhaps these economic pressures combined with political and social repression which brought Hazaras and the other Shia minorities (particularly the **Qizilbash** – a Shia minority in Kabul) together politically during the 1960s and 1970s.

## Uzbeks and Turkmen

Forming together about 13% of the population before 1978 and about 19% today, Uzbeks and Turkmen are Sunni Muslims. They are ethnically and linguistically Turkic, and closely related to the Turkish people of modern Turkey to the west, and identical to the majority Muslim population of Soviet Central Asia, across the border to the north.

The greatest share of Afghanistan's arable land in the north is occupied by Uzbeks and Turkmen. In addition, the production of carpets by the women has brought them considerable supplementary income. Cotton production and Karakul enabled them to become involved in Afghanistan's first industrial and entrepreneurial activities, the textile industry and Karakul trade with the USSR and the West.

Because of their economic wealth, the Uzbeks and Turkmen have not been dependent on the central government. They have not attempted to gain political influence in the state to any extent.

Since the 1880s, Pashtun tribes have also raided parts of the northern areas and have occupied some of the land previously belonging to Uzbeks, Tajiks and Turkmen – particularly in Mazar-e-Sharif, Baghlan, and Qunduz.

Other Afghan Turkic groups include **Kypchak** (an Uzbek sub-group), and the **Kazakh** (each numbering between 3,000 and 20,000 people). In the same range are the **Wakhi**, who have been claimed by foreign scholars as being either Turkic or Iranian. The majority speak Wakhi, which is related to a Turkic group, but some also speak Kirghiz. Jadwiga Pstrusinska describes them as 'Mountain Tajiks'. The **Kirghiz**, who formerly lived near the Chinese border (approximately 5,000 people), have entirely emigrated to Turkey since the Soviet occupation of their territory in 1980.

## Nuristanis

The Nuristanis have a population of approximately 100,000. They reside mainly in the east – between the Pashtun tribes of Kunar, the Kalash in Pakistan's Chitral, and the Tajiks of Badakhshan in the north. Their scattered settlement is another result of Amir Abdul Rahman's expansionism. During his rule, what was then called Kafirstan was converted to Nuristan (the 'Land of Light') by forced Islamization of the tribe. Even in recent times, many other ethnic groups were suspicious about them for still being 'kafirs' – a word which can be interpreted as 'infidel'.

Nuristan is located in the middle of the Hindu Kush mountain range in four valleys, with each valley having its own distinct language/dialect – Kati, Waigali, Ashkun and Parsun. Nuristan has very little arable land, with the vast majority of the area being covered by forest. The main base of economy is animal husbandry – mainly goat-herding. A little maize and barley are grown but the Nuristani people survive mainly on milk and milk products.

Very few Nuristanis have had access to education. Yet, among those who travelled to Kabul and were able to gain access to schools, some have gained prominence as well-known figures in the army and the government in Kabul.

## Panjsheris

Although the Panjsheris are not always classified as a separate group – they are Tajiks – they display some of the characteristics of a minority and their important role as a resistance force during Soviet occupation has reinforced this status. Like the Nuristanis, they comprise a population of approximately 100,000. They practise Sunni Islam, and speak a language known as Panjsheri, which is a dialect of Dari. They live in the mountainous areas north of Kabul. Like Nuristanis, they live in high mountains with limited access to land, and traditionally derive their livelihood from animal husbandry.

After Hazaras, Panjsheris formed the second largest group of unskilled labourers in Kabul city. A significant number worked in semi-skilled professions such as driving and mechanics. Socially and politically, Panjsheris were as insignificant as the Hazaras and Nuristanis, with only a few people in high-ranking positions in the army and the government in Kabul.

All three groups initially remained independent during the war with the USSR (without affiliation to any political party), but Panjsheris became national heroes. Their young commander, Ahmad Shah Masud, now controls vast areas of northern Afghanistan.

## Baluchis and Brahuis

The Baluchis and Brahuis together number approximately 300,000. They reside in the pastoral lands of the south-west and south. They practice Sunni Islam, and their language are Brahui and Baluchi. The former is classified by Jadwiga Pstrusinska as a member of the 'Dravidian family, northern group'.

Their main economic activity is agriculture and animal husbandry. In addition, many trade and smuggle goods between Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Like the Kurds, Baluchis are divided between three countries – Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. They have a tradition of rebellion against their respective central governments to maintain their autonomy, and have also had ambitions to create an independent separate state of Baluchistan. Their demands have always faded after political repression by all three countries. Unlike the Kurds, their struggle for independence has seldom been echoed in the outside world.<sup>11</sup>

## Aimaaq

There are estimated to be about 800,000 Aimaaq people living on the steppe land in the north-west. They are a sub-group of the Turkic population. Like the Uzbeks and Turkmen, their main economic resource is carpet and kelim weaving. Aimaaq, however, lack rich agricultural land.

## Nomads

Nomads, sometimes called **koochis**, are not an ethnic group but a social one. Nevertheless they have some of the characteristics of a distinct ethnic group. The issue of nomads has always been a controversial one, both among Afghan government officials and among various foreign scholars. Numerous studies have been written during the last 50 years, and these give widely differing figures for the numbers of nomads.

Some foreign anthropologists estimate the number to be between one and three million. The figure of three million has also been published by Afghan government authorities. Some estimates in the 1960s and 1970s showed that each year approximately two million nomads were crossing the frontier into Pakistan to reach their winter pastures, and returning to Afghanistan for summer.

However, Alfred Janata argues that these herders (mostly Pashtuns) have attracted considerable attention mainly because of their apparently bizarre lifestyle and attractive black tents... and their seeming omnipresence. Every traveller, foreign or Afghan, unavoidably came across a group of them. Thus the opinion arose that they could be counted in millions. As a consequence, their number has been greatly overestimated – as Afghan government and also scientific publications show.

*'My [Janata's] personal estimates, after fieldwork in Paktya Province during the spring migration of 1972 and according to pastures available, set their number at about one million. A census, under UN auspices, in 1978 decimated even this number by more than 50%: there are less than half a million full nomads in Afghanistan, which makes up to a trifle over 3% of the total population of 15 million.*

*We have counted, at five 'bottlenecks' in Paktya, the nomads on their way from their winter camps in Pakistan to their summer pastures in Afghanistan. From our results it is also clearly shown that less than 100,000 nomads, annually, crossed the international borders.<sup>12</sup>*

Marek Gawecki argues that it is not easy to differentiate between the different categories of nomads, semi-nomads, and semi-settled populations. From the studies carried out by Gawecki in 1976 in central and northern regions of Afghanistan, it appears that among different social communities of northern Afghanistan, during harvest and threshing time, the inhabitants move to the fields

where they stay in round tents and where they also remain for a certain period after harvest, overseeing cattle turned out to pasture on the stubble fields at the time.<sup>13</sup>

Gawecki concludes his report by saying that:

*'On the basis of existing historical materials one can suppose that at times before the reign of Amir Abdul Rahman, ie. before the period of greater resettlement and settlement movements, individual villages were inhabited by ethnically and culturally homogeneous social communities to a greater degree than they are today. The mobility of the population was much smaller and only in sporadic cases did it go beyond the tribal territories. At those times resettlement and migration of populations were also the result of conquests and wars.'<sup>14</sup>*





# HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN

## Ancient History

Afghanistan's ancient history is not so very different from its recent one. The country has experienced continual invasion from various empires, followed by its integration into the spheres of influence of those empires. One or another part of the country has been ruled at different times by different conquerors, invaders, and builders of empires, including Greeks, Mongols, Turks and Uzbeks.

Great conquerors – Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane and Babur among others – attracted by the wealth of India, successfully invaded Afghanistan in order to reach the subcontinent. For example:

*'From petty principalities in Afghanistan adventurers built many mighty but ephemeral dynasties in medieval India, the most splendid of which proved to be the Mughal empire, founded by Babur (1483-1530), ruler of Kabul.'*<sup>15</sup>

Afghanistan also became a central point for the meeting of different cultures. These cultures were brought partly by the invading armies, but also through their merchants who followed the paths of the invaders in pursuit of commercial exchange.

Nor was merchandise the sole commodity of exchange. Various art forms, cultural values and philosophies flowed in the wake of the invasions. The Greek gods were followed by Buddhism, and Buddhism by Hinduism. These religions were all finally driven out in the 8th Century by Islam, spread by Arab armies.

*'The prophet Zarathustra, founder of the Zoroastrian religion, is believed to have died in Balkh [north Afghanistan] in 522 BC. Alexander the Great became a national hero in Afghanistan. Cities were built and in part settled by Asian Greek colonists, some of which are becoming known only during this century by excavation and identification of the abandoned sites of once-great cities in remote regions, now often wastes and deserts.*

*Indo-Greek art was responsible for the Buddha-image which became the symbol of the spread across Asia of the Buddhist religion, and still scattered over the land are magnificent remains of the Buddhist Gandhara culture which flourished here too, until the 8th Century AD, when Islam began to replace it.'*<sup>16</sup>

Afghanistan's rich and diverse heritage in culture, language, and ethnicity is the result of its past history of multiple encounters. The bloody and violent nature of all these invasions has contributed to Afghanistan's relative underdevelopment and underpopulation in relation to its neighbours.

## The establishment of Durani power

The history of the Afghan state, however, is relatively recent. It was only in 1747 that Afghanistan became a separate and autonomous state. Pashtun tribes – now divided between Afghanistan and Pakistan – elected Ahmad Shah Durani by *jirga* (tribal council) as their chief. The Pashtuns then controlled major parts of the east and south-east, while the Uzbeks controlled the north.

*'The disintegration of two mighty empires, the Safavid in Iran and the Mughal in India, provided the opportunity for a great tribal confederation of Pashtuns in 1747.'*<sup>17</sup>

Therefore the history of the modern state of Afghanistan is primarily the story of the Pashtuns. The gradual emergence of a nascent sense of Afghan nationhood is a crucial contribution made by the Pashtuns. It also provided the Pashtuns with a lasting dominance over other ethnic minorities.

It is important to note that the election of Ahmad Shah Durani was based on his person, not on his family, nor on any ideology he may have put forward. After his death in 1773, the Durani empire started to crumble. As a result, conflicts developed among the various Pashtun tribes, and power struggles emerged. Yet the Durani family still managed to retain power until 1978 – when the PDPA seized power in the April coup. This put an end to the Durani dynasty in Afghanistan.

The 19th Century saw a protracted struggle between the British and Tsarist Russian Empires for control over Afghan territory. The British suffered disastrous losses in 1842 but, in spite of a defeat at Maiwand in 1878, were able in 1880 to impose the treaty of Gandamak, giving them control of Afghan foreign policy, which they relinquished in 1919 after the third Anglo-Afghan War.

The present frontiers were fixed about the turn of the century, between Afghanistan and British India (now Pakistan), and between Afghanistan and the then Russian Empire (later the USSR). The Durand Line, dictated by the British, ran through Pashtun territory and in some parts divides tribes, while the Russians dictated the settlements of 1888 (Amu-Darya) and 1895 (Pamir), all underpinned by the St Petersburg Anglo-Russian settlements of 1907. These also confirmed the allocation to Afghanistan of a finger of territory, the Wakhan Corridor in the north-east, which separates the northern borders of Chitral and Kashmir from what later became Soviet Tadzhikistan.



## 1880-1901: Amir Abdul Rahman

The *Amir* (King) extended his hold throughout the country by force, despite rebellious movements mainly but not exclusively by ethnic groups other than Pashtuns. Repression of minorities followed – Hazaras in central Afghanistan were persecuted, and Kafiristan (Nuristan) in the north-east was forcibly Islamized. This period saw the encroachment of ‘Pashtun colonialism’ as Pashtuns were installed in non-Pashtun territories, notably in the north.

## 1901-1919: Amir Habibullah I

Abdul Rahman’s son, Habibullah, was a modernizer. He opened the first western-style school in Kabul in the early years of his reign. The period saw a strengthening of British influence in Afghanistan’s foreign affairs, and the failure of the Afghan government to make any foreign contact other than with British-ruled India. The beginning of the constitutional movement was inspired by a young Afghan intellectual exiled in Turkey, Mahmood Tarzi. During World War I Afghanistan remained neutral.

## 1919-1929: King Amanullah

Habibullah’s son, Amanullah, was an even more enthusiastic modernizer than his father had been. This ultimately caused his fall from power, as most Afghans in the rural areas did not agree with his excessive reforms. The third Anglo-Afghan War occurred at the beginning of his reign during May 1919 and lasted only a month. The Rawalpindi Treaty awarded the Afghan government full rights to conduct its own foreign affairs. Diplomatic ties were established with Western European countries and the newly-formed USSR with its Bolshevik ideology.

Within Afghanistan the first moves were made towards the development of a constitutional monarchy. This was a major period of both reforms and rebellions. Reforms included education, and initial steps towards raising the status of women and their inclusion in the social life of the country. The reforms failed because of the lack both of a solid power base among the rural population, and of resources and technical personnel to carry them forward. Amanullah was overthrown in a rebellion which was organized across the border in British India and which was supported by religious and tribal leaders in the south.

## 1929: Habibullah II

The rebellion resulted in a Tajik leader, Habibullah, also known as Bacha-i-Saqao (‘Son of a Water Carrier’), seizing power. His nine-month reign was characterized by anarchy and civil war between Pashtun tribes of the south and a Tajik ‘bandit’ horde. The Pashtuns, led by Mohammad Nadir with British support from India, were eventually victorious and established the new monarchy.

## 1929-1933: Mohammad Nadir Shah

Nadir Shah denounced Amanullah’s reforms and returned to modified Islamic conservatism, but parliamentary ideals remained in the constitution in order to mollify Amanullah’s supporters. The Soviet influence was down-

graded by Nadir Shah, being replaced by greater support from the British. Political repression reached one of its highest peaks. Many intellectuals and members of the Constitutional Movement were killed or jailed, and Amanullah’s supporters in Kabul and in other provinces underwent massive repression. Nadir was finally assassinated by a student after only four years in power.

## 1933-1973: Mohammad Zahir Shah

The 40-year reign of Mohammed Zahir Shah can be divided into three separate periods:

**1933-1953: The avuncular period.** Mohammad Zahir, Nadir’s son, was only 16 years of age when he took the throne. He reigned, but his uncles ruled. There were new diplomatic initiatives. Afghanistan joined the League of Nations in 1934 and remained neutral in World War II. But for Afghanistan the most important events were the independence of India and the creation of Pakistan in 1947. The British counterweight to the USSR disappeared and the Pashtuns/Pathans of the North-West Frontier Province, in common with the other states and territories of British India, were offered the option of joining independent India or the new state of Pakistan – but not the option of joining the Pashtuns of Afghanistan, a grievance which had important consequences in the new period. The first foreign-supported development schemes in infrastructural projects began, as did internal entrepreneurial development using Afghan resources.

**1953-1963: First Daoud Era.** This was the first decade which saw Mohammad Daoud, King Zahir’s cousin, as Prime Minister. In order to return to reformist principles and practices Daoud needed a strong army, and so built up the military as a power base. Afghanistan became one of the founder members of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1955.

The government gained a great deal of economic and military aid from both Western and Soviet blocs – particularly the USA and the USSR – as part of the Cold War competition between the superpowers. The Soviets gained more influence in Afghanistan when they signed an agreement for a \$US 100 million loan. This was the first major loan of its size in Afghan history, and the first made by the USSR outside its immediate political sphere.

The enthusiasm for the creation of a Pathan/Pashtun state in Pakistan (‘Pashtunistan’)<sup>18</sup> of the (Pashtun) establishment of Afghanistan, and especially of Daoud, was emphatically not shared by the non-Pashtun majority, but the issue poisoned relations with Pakistan and this had the important consequence that John Foster Dulles, the US Secretary of State who was courting Pakistan as a Cold War ally, flatly refused to supply badly needed arms and equipment to the Afghan armed forces. The USSR was only too glad to step in and provide the equipment and the coup d’état which overthrew the monarchy in 1973 was led by Soviet-trained officers. There was increased border conflict with Pakistan which resulted in closure of the border and of the transit route with Pakistan.

The era was also one of major social reforms and economic development. As a result of the first two ‘Five Year Plans’ (1957-69), Afghanistan’s major import during this

time proved to be foreign aid. Despite some economic development, it was also a period of political repression.

**1963-1973: Constitutional monarchy.** In 1963 the 'Pashtunistan' problem with Pakistan, Daoud's ambitions, his disregard for the King, and the amendment of the constitution which banned members of the royal family from holding ministerial office (a measure enforced by the King) forced Daoud to resign.

Constitutional monarchy was introduced in 1964, but failed. In 10 years there were five successive governments, each with different political perspectives. Benefiting from the newly introduced law allowing a free press and political activities, a number of political parties were established, ranging from the far right to the far left. These parties participated in the general elections of 1965 and 1969.

During this time, the first Chinese aid came to Afghanistan. By the end of the 1960s, the People's Republic of China became Afghanistan's fourth major source of foreign aid, after the USSR, the USA and West Germany. But disaffection grew among educated people because of the failure of social and political reforms by five successive governments, which, combined with the effects of the droughts of 1969-71, were the underlying causes of the coup d'état of 1973 and the end of the experiment in constitutional monarchy and limited 'democracy'.

## 1973-1978: Republic of Afghanistan

These five years became the second Daoud era. The former Prime Minister and King Zahir's cousin, Mohammad Daoud, with the support of the army, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), and the USSR, overthrew the monarchy in July 1973 and announced the 'Republic of Afghanistan' with himself as President.

The first political parties had been established in Afghanistan in the early 1960s, and were based in Kabul. Some managed to attract a small group of the educated people outside Kabul, mainly from other provincial capitals and major cities. Their influence was so limited that only a tiny proportion of Afghanistan's estimated 10% literate population were active members of these parties.

The PDPA, following Marxist-Leninist ideology, was one of the most prominent of these new parties. The party was established in the early 1960s, and won several parliamentary seats in the parliamentary elections in 1965 and 1969. It was never a mass-based party. After the PDPA seized power in 1978 it claimed it had 50,000 members nationwide. Taking their own claim into account and the population of Afghanistan as an estimated 15 million, by their own admission they had the support of only 0.3% of the Afghan population.

Almost from its foundation, however, it had been divided. The major split came in 1969, caused by conflict between Noor Mohammed Taraki and Babrak Karmal, who disputed the leadership of the party. The split divided the party, principally between the *Khalq* ('people') and the *Parчам* ('flag') factions, but also into ethnic groups, ie. Pashtun (led by Taraki) and non-Pashtun (led by Karmal) factions. Through Soviet mediation the party reunited in late 1977

and early 1978 in preparation for the April 1978 coup d'état.

Shortly after Daoud's seizure of power, he started to work out a new constitution which was officially finalized in 1977. The new constitution differed little from the previous ones. The new constitution not only guaranteed the President's autonomy vis-à-vis the parliament, but it also ensured him a six-year term of office. For the first time in Afghan history, the army obtained legal guarantees allowing them to participate actively in the country's political life. The civilian authority was enforced further with a special police force, modelled after Iran's Savak and created with the assistance of the Iranian government.

Jolanta Sierakowska-Dyndylo argues that the President alone commanded singularly immense power and autonomy, owing to his control over the armed forces. The *Loya Jirga* (Grand Assembly), which was meant officially to be the supreme decision-making body of the country, did not possess any military arm or independence from the President.<sup>19</sup> In other words the Grand Assembly was merely used as an instrument to legitimize the existence of the ruling group. In order to force centralization and the extension of his power, Daoud also tried to replace the traditional ethnic and tribal values of the country by promoting nationalism. To do so he needed a strong army.

Sierakowska-Dyndylo also argues that:

*'the hegemony of the Pashtuns within the military and in political life was very strong, despite internal hostilities within this community'.<sup>20</sup>*

An army which was already under the firm control of the Pashtuns became more Pashtunized, until it was torn apart by the internal conflicts between the members from the Ghilzai tribe, whom Daoud had especially recruited as a base of his support, and the more royalist Durani tribe. This tribal conflict, accompanied by the infiltration of the opposition in the army, ended in battles from which new social forces emerged victorious.

Daoud's 'republican' Afghanistan also collapsed economically. This was due mainly to the inefficient economic system, its heavy reliance on the centre, and its lack of trained and qualified administrative and technical personnel. The consequence of the latter was that to implement its programme the government had to rely on a large number of expatriates – the majority of whom were Soviet citizens.

Afghanistan became politically, militarily and economically reliant on the USSR. Daoud attempted to reverse this total reliance, turning towards Pakistan, Iran and the West. But it was too late. The main beneficiaries were the PDPA. Neither reforms nor restriction of PDPA activities within the government and the army could prevent the PDPA coup of 27 April 1978.

# THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND PRIOR TO THE SOVIET INVASION

Like many other developing countries, Afghanistan became a focus of political contest by the great powers – primarily the USSR and the USA. Yet in Afghanistan, the contest proved to be a fatal one, for it resulted in a Soviet invasion, and the resulting warfare, fought and funded by outsiders for political and ideological reasons, had Afghans as its main victims.

During the period of the Cold War, under both the Afghan monarchy and the republic, any project undertaken in Afghanistan, supposedly to aid ‘development’, was in fact aimed at the satisfying long-term strategic needs of these outside powers, especially those of the USSR. Afghanistan’s infrastructure (roads, communications and later airports) was developed by both the USSR and the USA as part of their military strategy.

## Soviet aid

After Stalin’s death in 1953, the Kremlin’s approach to the emerging Third World underwent a rapid change. Moscow embarked on a new course in which economic as well as military aid was recognized as a powerful tool to extend political influence. (Many US policy-makers believed that under the constraints brought about by World War II, the USSR would need a long period to match the pace of American assistance to developing nations.)

The USSR entered the arena with publicly avowed goals identical to those of the Americans – to help the people help themselves and to keep newly independent nations from falling into the hands of the rival bloc (in this case the capitalist and imperialist bloc). Naturally enough, their real goal paralleled that of the Americans – to gain friends and influence governments through the powerful medium of foreign assistance. Efforts were concentrated on three main areas: infrastructure, minerals and agriculture, and alignment of foreign trade.

The construction of 3000 km of roads (partly as a joint venture with the USA, or to forward ‘peaceful coexistence’ as the Soviet advisors preferred to label it) went hand in hand with the construction of numerous airports. These vital communication links were all used by the USSR during and after the December 1979 invasion.

Agricultural projects were used to satisfy the needs of the USSR. Afghanistan was forced to grow cotton instead of wheat to feed its population, while wheat was imported from the USSR. The Nangarhar Valley project, which furnished power as well as irrigation, eventually ended up producing agricultural items almost entirely for Soviet needs. The project brought Afghanistan an annual income of Afs 120 million (\$US 1.5m). The annual costs, however, amounted to Afs. 200 million (\$US 2.5m).<sup>21</sup>

Exploitation of natural gas in the north from 1967 to 1973, with a price paid by the USSR not even half that of the world market, is another classic example.

Soviet military ‘aid’ and loans to Afghanistan amounted to \$1.2 billion up to 1979 – almost as great as economic ‘aid’ and loans.<sup>22</sup> The American doctrines of the early 1960s, which aligned development with military aid, forced the Afghan government to turn even more towards the USSR and to place greater reliance on them economically, politically and militarily. From 1950 to 1960, the Soviet share of Afghan trade increased from 17% to 50%. In the beginning of 1980, it amounted to 75%. Since then it has increased further. Meanwhile, Afghanistan’s debts to the USSR have exceeded \$US 4 billion.

## US aid

US aid was motivated by similar considerations to the USSR’s – as an instrument of perceived US security needs under the theme of ‘containing communism’ by means of military pacts and alliances. Developing nations were asked to sign mutual security agreements with the USA and join military pacts against ‘communist aggression’ if they wished to ensure substantial amounts of American aid. In some cases the USA actively supported their military institutions. In effect, far from developing countries being encouraged to help themselves, they were drawn into a net of economic and military dependence.<sup>23</sup>

The American attitude towards aid to developing nations was affected by two amendments to its Foreign Assistance Acts. The Symington Amendment to the 1961 act required that the budgets of all states receiving US assistance be examined to determine what percentage was being spent on the military establishment. The Conté-Long Amendment to the 1967 act went further than a simple examination of budgets. It required that American aid to recipient states be cut in direct proportion to the amount being spent on sophisticated weapons.<sup>24</sup> It made explicit the links between American economic aid and military interest.

By the 1960s Pakistan was already receiving large quantities of modern weapons and aid from America. Until the Second Kashmir War between Pakistan and India in 1965, Pakistan received about \$US one million per day of foreign assistance of all types from the USA. In the same period, Afghanistan’s requests to the USA for military assistance to correct the ‘balance of power’ in the region were constantly rejected. This was solely because Afghanistan refused to participate in the Baghdad Pact (later CENTO) with Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq, Britain and the USA; and refused to sign the required Mutual Security Agreements.<sup>25</sup>

## The effects of aid

Between the early 1950s and 1979, when it halted its aid, the USA loaned or granted a total of \$US 532 million to Afghanistan. Soviet credits extended over the same period were more than double that sum – over \$US 1265 million – and were far more effectively deployed.<sup>26</sup> As the Cold War took hold, Daoud (Prime Minister 1953-63, and President of the Republic of Afghanistan 1973-78) employed the time-honoured Afghan tactic of playing off one power against another. He delighted in taking aid from both superpowers, and was ‘happiest when he could

light his American cigarettes with Soviet matches'!

Inevitably, many of the aid projects were far from successful and resulted in innumerable problems and wastage of money. Classic examples of failure and lack of efficiency were the American-funded and managed Hilmand Valley Project and the Soviet-funded Nangarhar Valley Project, both designed to become Afghanistan's bread-basket.

The impact of agricultural and other development projects never reached the rural population, but remained in the cities. By 1978, Afghanistan was still one of the poorest countries in the world.



## THE SOVIET INVASION AND AFTER

### The 'Saur Revolution' April 1978 – December 1979

Before 1978, the two major factions of PDPA, Khalq and Parcham, doubtless with Soviet persuasion, temporarily composed their differences. On 27 April 1978, the PDPA, with backing from the army and massive Soviet support, staged a violent coup d'état. Daoud and his family were killed. Nur Mohammad Taraki became the first PDPA President and announced the formation of the 'Democratic Republic of Afghanistan'.

The so-called Saur Revolution (Saur is the second month of the Muslim calendar; it coincides with April) of 1978 was a classic example of a 'developing country revolution', implemented by military men and enforced by a minority of educated people. The new government attempted to introduce a number of changes which touched the deepest traditions of Afghan society: land was to be redistributed and the lease-system changed; formal education was to become compulsory and secularized; women would be liberated from male domination. Yet instead of explaining their proposed reforms and working through the community structures, the government forced reforms on them. This in turn became one of the major reasons why the people reacted so strongly against the reforms.

The inward-looking conservative Afghan society resented these reforms from 'above' and saw them as a clear interference into their old traditional structures. There had long been a deep division in Afghanistan between the people of the town, essentially Kabul, and those of the country. To the great majority of the population, rural and without formal education, the town-dwellers were seen as 'bare-heads', people who wore European clothes – bureaucrats, teachers, military officers, arrogant unbelievers – whereas the country was the home of tradition and virtue, where people respected Islam and dressed modestly.

Furthermore the reforms were introduced in a totally alien and foreign way. Like King Amanullah, the PDPA proposed reforms which were not properly thought out, some of which ran shockingly counter to Muslim practice, and moreover sent out young party activists in European clothes to implement them. In short, the PDPA tried to follow Soviet or European systems, forgetting that these were based on literate and industrialized societies whereas the Afghan population had a completely different social and political structure. Forcing reforms on a reluctant population resulted in nationwide unrest, with a growing number of conflicts and armed insurrections. In addition, all their reforms were implemented without a strong economic base and support to the recipients and lacked the necessary infrastructure.

As had happened in previous cases, centralized power, imposed upon tribal societies, failed. In Afghanistan this failure of economic, social and political reforms resulted in direct Soviet intervention. These events took place against a backdrop of Cold War superpower rivalry, in



which the USSR, led by a stagnant Brezhnevite leadership, saw a threat – real or perceived – to its sphere of influence in Asia, and sought to counter this threat by militarily invading Afghanistan.

But in-fighting between the factions of the PDPA continued and intensified. Babrak Karmal and Najibullah fled into exile. Taraki was murdered in September 1979 and replaced by his deputy, Hafizullah Amin, who presided over a period of massive arrests and executions. However, opposition continued; there was spontaneous armed resistance in the countryside which the army was unable to suppress. By the end of the year, the army itself was mutinous and it seemed inevitable that the PDPA government would be overthrown and probably replaced by some form of Islamic government.

It would have been difficult for the Brezhnevite USSR to be seen tolerating the replacement of a Communist government on its borders by an Islamic government, especially in view of the unrest in Iran, which had resulted in the overthrow of the Shah and the installation of an Islamic government. Hafizullah Amin was murdered in his turn and the Parcham faction of the PDPA gained the support of the Soviets.

On 24 December 1979 Soviet forces swept into Afghanistan, allegedly at the invitation of the Afghan government. The new President was Babrak Karmal, a former left-wing deputy tolerated by the former monarchy, who at the time of the invasion was a refugee in the USSR.

## **The Soviet-Afghan War: 24 December 1979 – February 1989**

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was to last for almost a decade. The years of the Soviet occupation have been deeply traumatic ones. Ruthless ground and air attacks have devastated the vast reaches of the countryside, killed and injured thousands of non-combatants and led to five million refugees fleeing to camps in Pakistan and Iran. The presence of thousands of mines and tens of thousands of anti-personnel mines, planted by Soviet forces, all over Afghanistan will remain a major obstacle to refugees and displaced people wishing to return to their villages.

Within Afghanistan there have been repeated widespread violations of human rights by both government and some Mujahedin forces, whether in the government's imprisonment and torture of political opponents, most notably by the notorious KHAD secret police, or in the disregard of basic rules of warfare, where the main victims have inevitably been civilians.

Young men from the age of 16 were forcefully conscripted into the army and, after a mere two weeks of training, sent to the battle fronts to fight against the Mujahedin. Many conscripts did not survive. Others survived with severe injuries. Today, in the cities of Peshawar and Kabul, a common sight is young men and children in wheelchairs or hopping on one leg, or with only one arm.

Thousands of youth and children were removed to the USSR for 'educational purposes'. Their fate is still not

clear. Many of these children were either from very poor families (most were taken away by force from their families) or orphans whose parents had been killed in the war.

Until 1978, Afghanistan was self-sufficient in food production. As a result of the war, agriculture and animal husbandry, the main sources of income for the vast majority of the population, was reduced to less than 50% of pre-1978 levels. Destruction of irrigation systems, orchards and fields and bombardment of houses and villages have driven over half the population outside their homelands as refugees and internally displaced peoples. Together with the mines and general insecurity, the destruction of the infrastructure has been a major factor in preventing the repatriation of refugees.

The Kabul regime proved to be a puppet government, installed by the Soviet leadership, and its policies were dictated by the USSR. It has therefore never followed any clear policies of its own, but was instead embroiled in internecine faction fights, such as that which led to the replacement of Karmal by Najibullah in 1986.

The USSR had adopted the same policy of 'divide and rule' with the PDPA in Kabul as the US/Pakistani alliance with the Mujahedin. The already existing friction within the PDPA of Khalk and Parcham had been divided into at least six further major groups. Their split was on the one hand caused by a struggle for power (both by individuals and by groups); but on the other it also ensured for the USSR a smooth transfer of power to another group, should the existing one become too vulnerable or turn against Soviet interests and strategy. The conflicts between Hafizullah Amin and Taraki, both from the Khalq faction, and Karmal and Najibullah, both from the Parcham faction, should be seen in this light.

Ministries in Kabul were literally run by Soviet 'advisors'; military orders were restricted to those given by the Soviet military, as were all operational plans and their implementation. Special emphasis was given to education and to public and social services. The national education system was modelled on the Soviet system, curricula were designed by Soviet specialists, kindergartens were run by Soviet women. The media and all public and cultural institutions were controlled by the USSR, including cinemas, theatres, music, etc.

The total number of victims of the years of occupation cannot be accurately counted. Apart from an estimated one million dead, and another 200,000 to 300,000 disabled Afghans, there are tens of thousands of orphans and widows left behind, whose survival in the devastated Afghan economy will be a major responsibility of any future government.

## POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS IN THE 1980s

The fate of Afghanistan and its people in the 1980s has not been determined by Afghans but by powers outside their country and their control. Although the outside powers have long had a strong interest in determining Afghan state policies and allegiances, this has had little real impact on the majority of Afghans, who continued to lead their traditional life in the countryside.

The Soviet invasion and its consequences not only disturbed this equation but brought other outside factors and powers into the conflict. Once the USSR had invaded Afghanistan, their efforts were inevitably concentrated on the war and the issues of aid and development were relegated or ignored.

On the other side were a variety of sometimes uneasy and competing allies. As previously, the USA was the main opponent. But the lead was taken by Afghanistan's neighbouring states. Pakistan became a leading protagonist, backed by the USA. Iran, isolated by choice from the superpowers, had its own aims to fulfil. Other countries, such as Saudi Arabia and some Western European states, also played a role.

It has been these outside forces which have helped to shape both the course of the government inside Afghanistan and the resistance outside. By trying to transform Afghan political and military structures into their own images – as either centralized states (the USSR), competing political parties (the USA) or a fundamentalist Islamic *jihad* (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran) – outside states have attempted to shape the future of Afghanistan.

### Pakistan

Pakistan had been governed by a military regime under President Zia-ul-Haq since the deposition of the civilian government of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The US government saw the Pakistan government as a means of re-establishing an anti-communist and anti-Soviet CENTO alliance including Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan. This placed Pakistan in a strong position to negotiate huge amounts of aid from the US government.

Zia had hopes that by forcing the Soviets to quit Afghanistan militarily and to give up their influence politically, Afghanistan would be completely controlled by Pakistani policy-makers and its future decided by them. Zia also supported the establishment of another Islamist state in the region.

General Zia was a devout Muslim and, like other generals in the Pakistan army, he was also a devout anti-communist. Therefore his sympathy for the Afghan Mujahedin came from both political and religious motivation. President Zia saw his mission in Pakistan as enforcing a strict Islamic regime, *Sharia*. To this end, in 1979 he announced compulsory Islamic taxes (*Zakart*) to replace the existing tax system, phasing out of the giving of interest by banks, and meting out severe punishment for people violating the sanctity of Islam.

As a first step towards achieving his objectives, Zia announced that political parties would be the only channel through which the Afghans could receive military and humanitarian assistance. The fundamentalist Islamic party of Pakistan, the *Jamaat-i-Islami*, together with the military rulers of the country under the leadership of President Zia, from the beginning of the conflict took charge of all humanitarian and military assistance to the Afghan refugees and resistance groups.

By the end of 1980 there were over 40 Afghan political parties, ranging from liberals, social democrats and nationalists to moderate and fundamentalist Islamic parties – all officially registered with the Pakistani authorities.

It was at this juncture, in early 1981, that the Pakistani authorities, after having screened and investigated the mandates and ideologies of all these parties, decided that with the exception of six 'major Islamic' parties (later to become seven), the remainder had to close their offices and abandon their activities. Since that time no other political parties and organizations have been allowed any political activity. This decree meant that in effect power, in the form of arms and humanitarian supplies, was being channelled through parties who favoured the Pakistan government's policy towards Afghanistan. These became known as the Seven-Party Alliance, which was based in the Pakistani city of Peshawar.

The whole process of Pakistani involvement in Afghanistan goes hand in hand with its relations with the USA. When, in January 1980, President Carter announced that the USA would help Pakistan to defend itself along its western borders with Afghanistan, and in the east with India, with \$US 400 million in military and economic aid by March 1980, President Zia coolly rejected the offer as 'peanuts', arguing that his army, his sole constituency, needed more than that if it was to be kept happy.

Eventually the Reagan administration, which took office in January 1981, came forward with a better offer, and an agreement was reached in September 1981 on a \$US 3.2 billion military and economic aid package, spread over six years, making Pakistan the biggest recipient of American aid after Israel and Egypt.<sup>27</sup>

This huge amount of American aid enabled Zia to gain more confidence and support among the Pakistani population. At the same time, the Afghan crisis gave him an opportunity to suppress political demands made by the opposition, including the PPP. Apart from military assistance, US aid also helped the shaky Pakistani economy. By 1985, Zia felt secure enough to relax martial law and non-party elections were held. A civilian government took over some state functions, but few doubted that the real power stayed with Zia.

### The USA

US aid went beyond military assistance to Pakistan. The first official military assistance to the Mujahedin (literally 'soldiers of God', translated frequently in the Western media as 'freedom fighters') started in 1981 with a request for \$US 30 million in covert aid for Afghanistan, which was approved without any discussion or argument by Congress. By 1985 annual US military aid to the



Mujahedin had reached about \$US 280 million, making it the biggest single covert CIA operation anywhere in the world since the Vietnam war.<sup>28</sup>

Afghanistan's civilian population and humanitarian assistance for the people were of less concern to US policy-makers, at least until 1985. After the first years of the war, it was decided to extend American aid to economic and humanitarian assistance as well as military support.

In late summer 1985, the first USAID team, accompanied by some congressmen, arrived in Pakistan. The aim was to establish an office to overview and supervise the entire humanitarian aid earmarked for Afghanistan. Officially under the umbrella of the Pakistan government, it was named 'Pakistan Welfare International' (PWI). The congressmen also visited a number of organizations already involved in cross-border projects, and announced the programmes they intended introducing. These fell mainly into the categories of health, education, emergency relief and agriculture. Offices and sub-offices were established in Islamabad and Peshawar, and in the US Embassy and Consulate.

After attempts at direct negotiations with the government of Junejo (Prime Minister) and their failure to persuade the civilian government to attend the official opening of PWI, USAID officials eventually changed their policy and decided to implement their programmes through the Seven-Party Alliance. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were requested when submitting applications for projects to have their applications endorsed by one of the political parties and name specific commanders in their respective areas through which the projects would be implemented. While in the initial phase of 1985/86 some NGOs received funding from USAID for their cross-border projects, in 1987 the policy of working through the political parties was enforced.

There is a clear rationale to USAID planning to implement humanitarian activities in Afghanistan by means of the PWI and the Seven-Party Alliance. Their prime interest was not so much to assist the civilian population in Afghanistan as to strengthen the political parties, in the hope that they would have greater influence in the future policies of the parties. Most of the aid stayed in Pakistan with the political parties, and most of the goods were reportedly sold there on the open market. Some observers estimated that only about 20% actually went into Afghanistan, and most of this was used to support the resistance groups, not the civilian population.

The basic motivation of the USA in Afghanistan was strategic and ideological: to 'make Afghanistan Russia's Vietnam', to 'let the Soviets bleed there', and thus force their retreat from the country. The Texan Senator Charles Wilson, in his appeal to the US Congress in 1985 to secure Stinger missiles for the Afghan resistance, stated bluntly and crudely:

*The Soviets have lost about 25,000 troops in Afghanistan so far. In Vietnam, we lost 58,000. So I suppose the Russians owe us another 33,000 dead.*<sup>29</sup>

## Saudi Arabia

In order to attract additional funds for the Afghan resistance from the Gulf States, and in particular the rich Saudis, the USA courted the Saudis. In late 1981, Riyadh agreed to join the CIA's worldwide anti-communist crusade in exchange for permission to buy five AWAC surveillance planes, despite congressional opposition. Thereafter, according to some accounts, the Saudis matched the CIA dollar for dollar on funding for the Mujahedin, funnelling more than \$US 1.5 billion into CIA bank accounts in Switzerland and the Cayman Islands in 1984 and 1985 alone.<sup>30</sup>

But there was also a religious motivation for Saudi involvement: the Saudis wished to promote Wahabism, although this sect had little popular support in Afghanistan. One of the seven parties, *Itihad-i-Islami*, led by Sayaf, was set up with Saudi funding. Other political movements also arose to promote Wahabism, causing considerable discord within the resistance movement.

## Western European countries

A major problem for USAID remained the existence of numerous European organizations, most of which had funding possibilities and sources in their own home countries and were not dependent on USAID funds. They could therefore implement their activities directly with local commanders and/or village councils, bypassing the political party system.

Although European governments (except for Germany and Italy, which were involved in small-scale projects) did not have any direct contacts with the refugees nor inside Afghanistan, they were represented by over 30 non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Most of these agencies received funds from their respective governments to run their activities in refugee camps as well as in Afghanistan itself.

American NGOs were receiving ever greater amounts of channelled USAID money, yet USAID officials must have been aware that 60-80% of the aid brought into Afghanistan by the European Community (EC) or other European states was reaching the civilian community, while most of the US aid remained either in political party headquarters or with the Peshawar-based so-called 'commanders'.

## Iran

The situation in Iran was chaotic in the early 1980s. A fundamentalist Shia Islamic government had come to power in 1979, after the violent overthrow of the Shah's regime, and in the first years of power faced both internal opposition from political opponents and non-Persian ethnic minorities and war with its neighbour, Iraq. While the Iranian government was interested in gaining influence in Afghanistan, and in the resistance there, they were not able to contemplate any major external involvement because of the fragility of their Islamic revolution and the need for internal consolidation.

The first indications of direct intervention from the Iranian side came in 1982, when they realized the extent

of American attention being paid to Afghanistan with the agreement of the Pakistan government. The Iranians therefore decided to counter the pro-American Sunni-based Islamic parties of Afghanistan with a Shia influence. In 1982 a group of Iranian politicians, under the close control and supervision of the Iranian consulate in Quetta, entered Hazarajat in central Afghanistan to establish a number of political party offices. Some of these parties, based in Qom, Mashhad and Tehran, had only recently been formed with support from the Khomeini regime.

In order to establish the authority and power of the newly-formed pro-Iranian parties in Afghanistan – particularly in Hazarajat, which is an area with an almost entirely local leadership, and very little attachment or affiliation to political party systems – a number of military offensives were launched in the area. Local leaders were accused of extending the old ‘feudal and chieftain’ system into the area. The fighting was extended to such an extent that at least 4000 civilians and resistance fighters died in 1984 alone, along with scores of local and area commanders and leaders.

This resulted in a major split and division of the Hazara and other Shia communities in Afghanistan into eight major groups, the majority of which were created and supported by the Iranian government and remained basically pro-Iranian, while the remainder became anti-Iranian.

In 1989 and 1990, in addition to the internal infighting among the Hazara groups, the conflict was further complicated by the machinations of some of the political parties based in Pakistan, who refused to extend either military or political support to the Hazaras and Shias. Sunni parties, such as the *Hezbi Islam*, established military bases and fought with the Shia parties in order to gain control over the region. As a result of these power struggles, the central provinces of Afghanistan witnessed a number of major internecine incidents and the killing of numerous innocent people.

## Afghan political parties in exile

In the aftermath of the Soviet invasion, the Afghan resistance in exile followed traditional ways of fighting and organizing. Yet it soon became obvious, to the majority of both civilians and resistance fighters, that without outside assistance, they would be unable to continue the war against such powerful enemies. But this outside assistance exacted a high price.

The resistance was told by the Pakistan and US governments that their traditional political structure – with which they had been able to fight the British Empire, the Tsars and other previous invaders – was a primitive one and that in order to organize their just struggle against a superpower equipped to the full with heavy war machinery, they would need to look for an alternative political and military system.

Thus they were forced to accept the alternative solution suggested by the neighbouring states. This solution saw the establishment of a political party system – a system strange and alien to the vast majority of Afghans. Furthermore it was a system designed to both divide and

control the resistance. The Afghan political parties in Pakistan either failed to understand their host country’s long-term strategy, or completely ignored it. They chose, instead, to play along with the new system for the sake of building up power bases, and the possibility of a role in the future government of Afghanistan after victory was gained.

There were many reasons for this failure and ignorance, but the most important was that none of them, with the exception of the *Hezbi Islami* of Afghanistan led by Gulbudin Hekmatyar, were politically minded people. They were people with some limited religious and/or tribal influence, in limited parts of the country, but they lacked understanding of politics or of military, economic or social affairs. Most of the Afghan population were ignorant of international affairs and political conspiracies, and were thus forced to accept the new system and experience it for themselves. Access to military and humanitarian assistance through the political parties made them accept the impositions more readily.

However, after the initial years of the war, by 1983/84, resistance groups, civilians and refugees alike had lost faith in the political parties, which were becoming increasingly corrupt and power-hungry. In addition, their inability to produce a minimum national political programme for the future lost them credibility among the Afghan community.

## Political movements within rural Afghanistan

Caught between a ruthless and brutal government in Kabul and a divided and externally manipulated Mujahedin, both resistance groups and the civilians had no choice but to return to the old ‘primitive’ traditional social and political structure, based on the village and district level. But the friction within the political parties had left such a deep scar, particularly in the areas near the Pakistani and Iranian borders, that the restoration and re-establishment of the structure proved to be very difficult, if not impossible, in certain areas.

Nevertheless, most of the areas in Afghanistan managed the transition from political party system to their own known traditional system and reorganized the whole military, administrative and judicial structure, with some minor but significant changes.

The role of Islam during the war proved to be the greatest motivation for its continuation. Islam had gained more influence and was playing an important role, particularly in the judicial system. The previous tribal leaders, *Maliks* (representatives selected by the government), *Khans* and *Chiefs* (of whom the majority had left the country and had become refugees in Pakistan or Iran) were replaced by the younger generation. Thus fighters, warlords, and civilians who managed to stay in their home villages and survive, as well as religious scholars, became leaders.

Today, all military, economic, social and judicial decisions in the rural areas of Afghanistan are taken by these newly re-established bodies on a local basis. The political parties’ representation in the refugee camps has also been replaced by village representatives and religious leaders,

although the political parties still exert some influence.

Most of the resistance commanders have established their local authority and autonomy in their area of influence, even though they remain officially members of one or the other of the political parties in order to ensure a continuing of arms supply and commodities. They tend to affiliate with one of the fundamentalist parties who are most favourable to the 'Afghan resistance allies', the Pakistani and Iranian governments, the Gulf states or the US administration – all of whom were united under the slogan of 'fundamentalism is the best means to fight communism!', (as one US congressman told to the author in 1985).

A basic obstacle to the growth of these local councils remains continuing international intervention in Afghan affairs, particularly by Iran, Pakistan, and the Arab states. Besides, the superpowers see these developments of the council system as the basic roots for democracy in the long term. This was perhaps one, among many other important reasons, for the USSR deciding on a timetable for military withdrawal.

Although most of the bilateral aid (from the USA and the USSR) is channelled through the political parties of their choice, influenced by Pakistan, Iran and the Arab states, the majority of the aid in 1989/90, operated by NGOs and UN agencies, has been implemented through and with the assistance of the local councils.



## THE AID INVASION

### Foreign agencies in Afghanistan and Pakistan: 1978-90

A country which was scarcely known to the outside world until 1979 became a major focus of aid activity after the Soviet invasion. Ostensibly the reason was humanitarian but, as previously, the real reasons were political. Governments were deeply involved and implicated in the affairs of Afghans in the refugee community and in Afghanistan itself. The political aims in the roles played by the governments of Pakistan, the USA, the Gulf States and Iran were more important than the plight of the Afghan people.

Many people from different walks of life were mobilized to work for the Afghans – Western anti-communists, missionaries (both Christian and Muslim), the UN, multilateral and bilateral agencies, and, particularly those Western and Islamic governments who followed the American call to 'make the Soviets bleed in Afghanistan'. But among them were also individuals who had known Afghanistan before the war, who had worked or researched, there and who were sympathetic to the Afghan cause and wanted to play their part.

Agencies with different mandates, targets and political background were involved in various projects both with refugees and inside Afghanistan. Although military aid was the main category of most of the aid from Western and Islamic countries, humanitarian aid was in many ways used as a political tool.

Some of the effects and problems of this aid invasion can be summarized as follow:

- The **dependency syndrome** among the refugees in Pakistan.
- The **failure of many projects** inside Afghanistan – for example, the dumping of thousands of tons of medicine in a country which had virtually no medical facilities; of food or cash for food programmes in areas where farmers would have been able to produce food if they had had the support to do so.
- The **influence of expatriate workers** who often had a complete lack of interest in and understanding of the social and political situation. This had particular ramifications in the rural areas. Other effects were: a refusal to involve Afghans in decision-making; restrictions of donor or head office policy; little understanding of development and therefore little attention paid to long-term community-based development.
- **Political rather than humanitarian criteria** were predominant. If the Soviet-backed government of Afghanistan was attempting to impose development activities by military means, the international aid community was little better. It used the desperate economic need of the people to introduce either Western or Muslim fundamentalist-oriented programmes. Although very different in approach, they all shared a common characteristic – all operated from the top down, instead of from the bottom up.

## The aid agenda

The role of international aid in Afghanistan from 1978 to 1990 is a classic example of the international aid world defining the agenda with minimal participation and involvement from the recipients and thus failing to respond to their needs.

By 1990, apart from the UN, bilateral agencies and Gulf State organizations, there were about 60 or so voluntary organizations in Pakistan working in refugee programmes and/or in various activities inside Afghanistan. Most of the NGOs were European and American. Their total budget for 1990 was approximately \$US 107 million, encompassing activities ranging from emergency relief to education and training, from income generation, health and sanitation to infrastructure and agriculture.

The day-to-day running of almost all these agencies is by Afghan staff, but the planning, decision-making, policy and funding are almost entirely the responsibility of expatriate personnel, who are the directors not only of their organization, but also of sectors within the organizations.

Compared to the large number of foreign agencies in Pakistan, in 1990 there were only eight Afghan voluntary agencies whose role was very limited both in refugee projects and activities in Afghanistan. Despite serious attempts by many highly qualified and educated Afghans to create their own organizations and take care of their own people, only a few have managed to establish some sort of loose contact with a few funding and programme-oriented agencies.

There are many reasons for their failure in achieving their goals, and primarily in securing funds for projects and activities they wish to implement. However, one of the reasons why many failed to compete for funding with their Western 'counterparts' and sister organizations was, and remains, donor fatigue towards Afghan agencies.

Different reasons account for this failure:

- **Lack of trust and confidence** between donors and Afghan groups is probably one of the major reasons; mainly because Afghan groups do not have a Western-style organizational structure with which donors feel at home and confident of the 'success' of planned activities, and also because of lack of language communication, failure to fulfil bureaucratic requirements, etc.
- Many donors, particularly bilateral and multilateral, are interested in **funding large agencies** with extensive activities and therefore large budgets, for which Afghan groups are unlikely to possess the means and infrastructure. One donor summed up this approach: 'It takes almost as much time to deal with a project of 5000 dollars as it does for one of five million dollars.'
- Many donor agencies, with the exception of the UN and a few bilateral agencies, do not have **local offices in Pakistan**, and are therefore out of reach for most Afghan agencies. Even the few who do have representatives in Pakistan are often difficult to gain access to. Without the help of expatriates, Afghans frequently find it impossible to arrange an appointment, let alone 'sell' a project, to donor representatives, who often sit in intimidating offices with imposing gates and security measures.

- Even in cases where there are donor representatives willing to deal with and fund Afghan groups and agencies, they cannot guarantee their head offices and governments will eventually approve project proposals put forward by them. Additionally, the **Western bureaucratic system** is almost always so complicated that even if a project is approved, it takes months to finalize, and for Afghans to gain access to the funds. There have been enough cases in the past decade where projects have ceased to exist by the time funds arrived. Unlike expatriate agencies with head offices or funds in reserve, most Afghan groups do not have access to funds which could be used as a bridging loan.<sup>31</sup>

Because of the lack of intimate contact with Afghans in general, many donor representatives take their information about Afghanistan, and the conditions there, from expatriates and a few English-speaking Afghans from a relatively limited circle, each with their own biases and agendas.

As a result of all these factors, most Afghans in the aid field who possess higher education and qualifications work as administrators, technical personnel, and in some cases as managers with foreign agencies rather than founding and running indigenous Afghan agencies.



# SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF THE MIGRATION

## Social dimensions

In pre-war Afghanistan, despite ethnic differences and inter-ethnic conflicts, there was always a large element of mutual co-operation and a complementary exchange relationship between the different groups. Political and economic conflict was evident, but it was balanced, and set within agreed boundaries. The different ethnic groups were distributed according to different ecological zones.

However, in the refugee situation, this co-operation and understanding does not seem to exist in such strength as it did before the war. For reasons of survival, refugees, both in Iran and Pakistan, have limited the inter-ethnic relationship to one of family network and neighbourhood.

In other words, although it has often been said that the Afghan population is merging into a single nation, there is no proof that this is in fact taking place. On the contrary, there even seems to be a weakening and loosening of inter-ethnic relationships among the various groups.

A study carried out by David Busby Edwards of the University of Michigan in 1986 describes the loosening inter-ethnic relationship among the Pashtuns, who form the vast majority of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.<sup>32</sup> In order

to interpret the results of his research, it is important to understand the social and political structure of the Pashtun communities in general.

A Pashtun's identity is seen in three main organizational features of his social structure:

- 1 ethnic identity and group membership;
- 2 belief in Islam;
- 3 the practice of Pashtun custom, which includes speaking Pashtu and following Pashtu custom, *Pashtunwali*. The Pashtunwali code includes: providing hospitality, reliance on a tribal council (Jirga) for resolution of disputes and decision-making, and the maintenance of female seclusion (*Purdah*).

Pashtun identity is further marked by value orientation, which places emphasis on male autonomy, equality, self-expression and aggressiveness – summarized under the concept of honor (*Izzat*).<sup>33</sup> Pashtuns also define *themselves*, and will never allow outsiders to define them. This effectively gives them personal identity, independence, and autonomy of action.

The fierce independence of Pashtuns has never allowed prolonged rule by any outsiders. Even in cases where people opposed the government and were subject to prosecution by the authorities, they could always find a safe haven in the tribal territories, where governments had neither power nor influence. Because of their constant movement throughout their history, geographical dislocation has not in itself caused any cultural change among the Pashtuns.

refugee map

The Edwards study shows that by receiving food rations in the refugee camps of Pakistan, the Pashtuns have betrayed their own notions of the reciprocal nature of exchange relations, and have thus placed themselves in a dependent position. The administrative structure of the Pakistani authorities replaced the village representation (*Malik* system) with the head of each individual family as the basis for distribution of rations. As a result, the structural unity of the group has been replaced by individualism and thus exposed the group to increased fragmentation and assimilation.

When the Pakistani authorities ordered the administration to check individual families in order to enumerate the refugee population, the refugees were forced to compromise their tribal solidarity, their valued autonomy and self-determination. The absence of independent subsistence farm land combined with the move towards dependent ration collection, and reliance on external agencies for assistance, has meant that the core values of Pashtun society have been abandoned.

Some Pashtuns tried to gain independence by seeking sources of income other than those provided by relief agencies, such as work in the local market. But even when jobs were available, they had to be of a type to ensure their honour and independence. Thus often jobs with less physical demands and higher incomes, such as being a servant, are not acceptable, whereas jobs with more physical demands and less income, such as manual labour, will be more acceptable in the eyes of Pashtun society. Thus, for example, selling fruit and vegetables in nearby bazaars, even though the income is minimal, is preferred to employment where they might have to work for someone else, which could put their pride and independence in question.

Problem solving has remained largely the domain of the refugee groups themselves, and is in many cases still handled by the traditional *Jirga* system. This is particularly so among the Pashtuns. However, in many cases the influence of political parties and/or religious leaders has taken over the judicial role. Within Afghanistan itself, particularly in the areas close to the Pakistani border and under the influence of the political parties, problems are often solved by the judicial committees set up by the various resistance political parties or even by individual commanders.

The study concludes that:

*‘the most damaging impact of the refugee camp framework therefore is not of migration, but the imposition of resettlement per se... Sentiments such as fighting for Islam and homeland, which are important to keep up the morale of both refugees and the resistance fighters, have been adapted to accommodate the realities of international politics and the imagistic requirements of photo-journalists, which has created an ambivalence and uncertainty with regard to their own ethical beliefs and customs that had not existed previously.’<sup>34</sup>*

## Cultural Dimensions

The Kabul regime, with its powerful media machinery (radio, TV, newspapers, etc), has attempted to introduce Soviet culture to Afghan society. Theatres, cinema, literature, music and art were completely dominated and controlled by the USSR and cadres of the PDPA. Even so, it is possible to hear and buy, in the city bazaars, cassettes of new and traditional indigenous music, while Hindi films remain popular.

The vast majority of writers, scientists, artists and scholars who opposed the regime were either killed or imprisoned. Many who managed to escape the regime’s repression, and yet were disappointed with the political parties in Pakistan and Iran, migrated to the west – to Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia. The majority of these intellectuals will be reluctant to return as long as the political instability continues.

At the same time the political parties in Pakistan and Iran, all religiously oriented, contributed to dismantling the remaining cultural, artistic and scientific heritage, this time in the name of Islam. Those who opposed them were severely punished or prosecuted, often in the same ruthless way as the PDPA treated its opposition.

One example, music, a national heritage and common among all ethnic groups, was banned by some of the political parties and some of their field commanders, for reasons of ‘mourning’ and Islam. Even weddings and Muslim festivities, which were always accompanied by music, dance and other activities, became scenes of grieving. As in Afghanistan, however, popular music could be bought on cassette in refugee bazaars.

An illustration of one of the most important aspects of Afghan culture is the literature of the past 12 years. Jan-Heren Grevemeyer, who has studied cultural changes within and outside Afghanistan between 1983 and 1989, compiled a book of the new ‘revolutionary’ literature of Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup> In the Afghan context ‘revolutionary’ does not mean progressive as opposed to conservative but as the interpretation of history, society and culture through different values – values which vary according to the point of view being expressed.

In the case of the Afghan resistance, this has emphasized the positive role of Islam, the perfidy of modernizers (such as King Amanullah), the colonialist intentions of outside powers (the Russian and British Empires, the USSR and USA), the expression of previously repressed minority histories and viewpoints, such as those of the fundamentalists, and ethnic minorities such as the Hazaras. Islam is seen as an internationalist movement against all Western influences, which from the Afghan perspective also includes communism, while national identity and nationalism are often condemned by fundamentalist groups who claim that Islam has no boundaries and that Jihad (holy war) is a duty for all Muslims, regardless of nationality or regional distribution.

Grevemeyer remarks that Afghanistan went through a modernization of its culture and in particular of its literature during the years of war. Yet the war of liberation, though the main cause of the changes, was only one part of a wide range of violent changes forced on the society collectively.



Briefly the major factors are migration, the struggle to survive, internal war between different parties inside and outside Afghanistan, individual murder of stigmatized persons, class struggle, emancipation of pariah communities, anti-centralist movements, and so on – factors simultaneously, in the same places, and often between the same people.

Grevenmeyer concludes his study by stating:

*‘...in Afghanistan, the modern historical sciences started off in the 1930s and had two aims: to legitimize the modern Afghan nation-state and to legitimize the actual ruling court elite. The new and modern elite, ie. those of the 1980s, started to rewrite the history, overthrow the old history books and texts, renounce the old heroes and replace them with the new ones or those who were never mentioned before. However, if one looks closely at the press and publication system of the Afghan resistance movement today and tries to analyse the underlying values, ideas and world views, it is very well possible to interpret the intellectual outcome of the last 12 years of violence as a base, as a beginning of a new revolutionary culture.’<sup>36</sup>*

Grevenmeyer rightly concludes that the real question remains not so much the actual values espoused by the emerging new cultures, but whether their implementation in the future Afghan society will be guided by democratic norms and rules, or dictated by the will or the political interest of one man or one party.



## ENDING THE AFGHAN CRISIS

Political intervention by outside powers in the internal affairs of Afghanistan has gone so far that any future prospect for a political settlement cannot rest with the Afghans alone. Any solution will have to accommodate the requirements of both the present regime in Kabul and the Resistance’s former and present allies, particularly the USA, China, Pakistan, Iran and, last but not least, India.

### The road to withdrawal

Brezhnev’s 1979 decision to invade Afghanistan had been a complete miscalculation, made on the basis of Soviet experience in Eastern Europe. He had been confident that the resistance would be defeated within a few months. His two most important considerations had been to prevent an allied communist state from falling into the hands of anti-communist Muslim fundamentalists (with the implications this might have for Soviet relations with other developing nations), and the fear of the reverberations on the largely Muslim republics of Soviet Central Asia, some of which shared borders and a common cultural heritage with Afghanistan.

The breakthrough leading to the Soviet withdrawal only came in 1986. In April 1985, after Mr Gorbachev took over power in Moscow (following the death of Chernenko), he still hoped that the Afghan resistance could be decisively defeated by a massive Soviet military operation. His plan, however, was doomed after President Reagan (April 1985) and his advisors officially called for efforts to drive the Soviet presence from Afghanistan ‘by all means available’. The implication of this announcement was the provision of Stinger missiles to the Mujahedin, followed by British Blowpipe missiles.

In February 1986 Gorbachev, as part of his stated new policy of *glasnost*, described the involvement of Soviet troops in Afghanistan as a ‘bleeding wound’, and announced his commitment to a solution to the Afghan crisis and a staged withdrawal of Soviet troops.

In February 1988 (prior to signing the Geneva Accords on 14 April 1988), Gorbachev announced that Soviet troops would start leaving Afghanistan on 15 May and complete its withdrawal within 10 months. The previous insistence on an intra-Afghan dialogue and a coalition government was dropped and the responsibility for any delay in the withdrawal of its troops would be placed with Pakistan.

Compared to the destruction caused to Afghanistan by the war, Soviet losses are far less numerous and damaging. Nevertheless, they had profound repercussions on Soviet society. There are no clear statistics about Soviet lives lost in Afghanistan; however, Western intelligence estimates 25,000 to 30,000 dead and an equal number of injured or disabled soldiers in the Soviet forces. The cost of the war was a heavy burden on the Soviet economy. Western sources estimate Soviet expenditure on the war in Afghanistan as costing a possible \$US 100 billion, with \$US 300 million being spent monthly on military and economic supplies to the Kabul regime even in 1991, at a time when the Soviet economy was itself collapsing.

## The Soviet withdrawal and the AIG

As the USSR were getting close to completing the withdrawal of their troops from Afghanistan in February 1991, the US administration was advised by the Pakistan army's secret service, Inter Service Intelligence (ISI), that the fall of the Kabul regime was only a few days away. In order to secure a replacement for the PDPA regime with a government of their choosing, the Americans hurried to put together a government in exile. In February 1989, the 'Seven-Party Alliance of Afghan Mujahedin', under the tight control and supervision of ISI, the CIA, and the Saudi secret service '*Mukhaberat*', announced the 'Afghan Interim Government' (AIG).

The AIG was never representative of more than a limited sector of the Afghan population. The role of the eight Shia parties in Iran, who had been promised a fair share, was completely neglected. No minority groups and, most importantly, none of the major field commanders were considered as part of the interim government – with the exception of a few who were closely affiliated with one or the other of the political parties in Peshawar.

The aim of the creation of such a 'government' was to launch offensives against major cities and towns and to overthrow the Kabul regime. However, the long and bloody battle of Jalalabad (east Afghanistan and the closest city to the Pakistan border) which cost about 10,000 lives, demonstrated all the shortcomings of the AIG and its member parties, who lacked the support and confidence of the civilians and resistance groups inside. It was also proof of the lack of understanding of Afghan realities by the US administration and their allies and the failure of a proper assessment of the military situation inside Afghanistan, on both sides of the conflict.

Nor did the AIG succeed in its aim of destroying the Kabul government. Despite frequent predictions of his imminent downfall, Najibullah managed to retain his position, largely due to the continuing supply of arms to his regime by the USSR. The many efforts of the Mujahedin forces to dislodge him were of limited military effectiveness but they were able to prevent him from extending his already limited control beyond the urban areas.

During 1989 and 1990, as the USA became more aware of the situation and therefore more disappointed with their partners, the ISI and the AIG, they attempted to look for other alternatives. The change of government in Pakistan and the transfer of power to Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in November 1988 was the only chance for the USA to revise their Afghan policy. But within Pakistan this policy was so deeply controlled by the army that the PPP government, already embroiled in political and ethnic conflict within the country, had no chance at all to change it.

The period since the withdrawal has seen continued fighting between the Kabul regime and the Mujahedin, in which the main casualties have been civilians. The conflict has been fuelled by massive arms supplies from the USSR (\$US three billion per annum) to the Najibullah government, and from the USA (\$US 700 million per annum) to the Mujahedin. Few refugees returned; the threat to life from continued fighting and the hundreds of thousands of live mines across the rural areas provided little hope of a

secure existence for former tribespeople. However, in some rural areas local leaders took control, asserting their independence of both the Kabul government and the AIG.

## The international perspective

The attitude of the international community towards Afghanistan went through a rapid change. International aid to refugees was significantly in decline by the beginning of 1991 while the overt criticism by some elements of the Mujahedin of US involvement in the Gulf War of early 1991 hastened the withdrawal of US military support.

The split between the central government in **Pakistan** and its army towards US involvement and military build-up in the Gulf was an open one. Controversy was evident even before the war had begun. In order to secure the release of large amounts of American military and economic aid, which had been blocked by the US authorities in autumn 1990, the Pakistan government decided to send its troops to join the Coalition Forces against Baghdad, despite bitter opposition and rejection of this policy from its army.

The split had also affected the member-parties of the **AIG**. While the fundamentalist faction wished to send some Mujahedin to defend the Muslim nation of Iraq against what they perceived as Western aggression, the moderates decided to send 300 resistance fighters to Saudi Arabia to join the Coalition Forces against Saddam Hussein. However, these took no part in the fighting and were employed in mine clearance on Saudi soil. Reports from Peshawar indicated that the decision was taken, despite the criticism of the majority members, to please the US administration and the Saudis and Kuwaitis as a result of pressure from both the Pakistan government and Peter Tomson, the US Special Envoy to the Mujahedin.

By February 1991, the USA informed the AIG that it could no longer guarantee the funding of its activities. This included the discontinuation of arms supplies. In March 1991, the US government officially announced that the assistance to the Afghan resistance would be scaled down significantly. Its humanitarian assistance for use inside Afghanistan for the year 1991 would remain at the same level as in 1990. However, it could not guarantee the continuation of funds for the next year.

As a result, all the AIG ministries in Peshawar were closed down by February 1991 and all its activities ceased. The 'President' and the 'Prime Minister' of the AIG, in different press conferences, confirmed that US assistance to the resistance was being cut down to 20% and the AIG could no longer afford to keep all its activities intact.

The rapid drop in international assistance to the Afghan refugees, as well as for the civilians inside the country, was partly because attention was being focused on crises in other parts of the world – Africa, the Gulf, the Kurdish refugees etc. The rehabilitation of Eastern Europe and the economic crisis in the USSR also diverted resources. This was clearly indicated by the Pakistan government's Commissioner for Afghan Refugees (CAR) in charge of approximately two million refugees in the North-West

Frontier Province of Pakistan. In a statement to the press in April 1991 on the occasion of the redundancy of about 2000 Pakistani employees working for Afghan refugees, the Commissioner stated that the redundancies were due to the marked decline in assistance provided by the UNHCR, WFP and other donor agencies.

Among other activities between the warring parties, two important political moves by the USSR took place in the region. Nikolai Kozyrev, ambassador of the Soviet foreign ministry, met the leaders of the eight Iran-based parties in late March 1991. The Soviet envoy in Kabul, Boris Pastuchov, on a visit to Pakistan met with the leaders of the seven Pakistan-based parties.

These important events were barely covered by the Western media. Afghanistan was only briefly mentioned on a few occasions during the first half of 1991. The earthquake in the east and north, the flood in the west and south-west, the capture of Khost by the resistance, and the killing of about 400 people after an alleged Scud missile attack by the Kabul regime on Kunar province, were the only reports which appeared. (Afghanistan received considerably more media coverage in the second half of the year.)

Yet while the USSR had shown firm commitment to solving the Afghan crisis according to its own wishes and requirements, (ie. a 20% share of a future government for PDPA), in May 1991 it was still pouring about \$US 300 million a month in military and economic aid into the Kabul regime, despite bitter criticism from the growing opposition within the USSR.

In April 1991, the **USA** claimed that its intelligence sources had proof of China's sale of ballistic missiles to Pakistan and that this issue would affect the US relationship with both Pakistan and China. This would make the release of the promised aid to Pakistan more difficult. (The aid was halted on the grounds that Pakistan was close to making its own nuclear weapons, despite having signed the proliferation agreement.)

Both the USSR and the USA agreed on one common point, even if they could not agree on how to solve the crisis. Both were aware of the dangers of a fundamentalist regime in Kabul. For the USSR it would mean a belt of Islamic states along its southern borders, who, although differing in their attitudes towards the USSR, all could turn against it. In addition, the establishment of a fundamentalist regime in Kabul would add momentum to the already existing nationalist and Islamic movements in the Central Asian republics.

At the same time the USA, having experienced the Iranian-type of Shia fundamentalism, is not prepared to see yet another fundamentalist state established in the region, whatever the cost. It may also fear that Pakistan would pursue a more Islamic direction if Afghanistan were to become an Islamicist state.

**China**, having supported the fundamentalist faction of the resistance for years (through the ISI), has played a passive role in the last three or four years. In 1991 it announced that a team from the Chinese government would be visiting Kabul in the near future to assess the possibility of continuing its development activities, which

were started in the 1970s and halted with the Soviet invasion.

The Shia parties of the Afghan resistance, based in **Iran**, were refused a fair share in the AIG in 1989. Since then, Iran has been more sympathetic towards the Kabul regime and its promises that the Shia parties would have their share in Kabul, should they decide to join forces with the regime. Although there is no indication that the Afghan political parties in Iran are willing to give up their arms and join the Kabul regime, the Iranian government is pursuing this policy.

The **Gulf States** who provided the bulk of arms and cash to the resistance are still interested in establishing an Afghan Muslim state sympathetic to them. This ambition remains, despite the disruption of their activities in Afghanistan during the Gulf War. Their prime interest is to establish a strong Sunni state similar to that in Pakistan. They intend to prevent any Iranian-type Muslim state which might strengthen Iran's power in the region. This intention will hold fast even though their policy towards the fundamentalist parties in the aftermath of the Gulf crisis may change.

For **Western Europe** – especially since the independence of the successor states of British India in 1947 – Afghanistan has had no significant economic or political role. Their support of the resistance during Soviet occupation was basically aimed at weakening the USSR and its ambitions in the developing world. It also rallied to the US call for an anti-communist war. Since the fall of the Berlin wall and the crumbling of the communist Eastern European governments, Europe as a whole has not shown any significant interest in Afghanistan and the solution of its crisis. It is assumed that future European policy will depend much on US policy towards Afghanistan.

The Gulf War and the declining international interest in the Afghan issue might be two international factors which could contribute to a possible solution of the Afghan crisis. Although the post-cold war relationship between the USA and the USSR began prior to the Gulf crisis, the Gulf War brought about a greater convergence between the US, the USSR, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan – all involved in Afghanistan.

While the rivalry between Iran and **Saudi Arabia** still continues, the restoration of diplomatic ties between the two countries might help to remove at least one conflicting factor. At the same time, the Saudis and other Arab allies, who have been mainly supporting the militant hardliners of the Afghan resistance (ie. the fundamentalist faction who would prefer to seek a military victory than a political solution), might cease their support for these groups as a result of their backing of the Iraqi regime rather than the anti-Saddam coalition forces. This, accompanied by the fading international interest in Afghanistan's affairs, might promote a sense of urgency for a settlement.

In the past, **India** has been one of Afghanistan's closest allies and has always played an important role in the region's political and security matters. In addition, India has a permanent interest in the well-being of the small but long-standing Indian community in Afghanistan, mainly based in Kabul.



## The UN plan

It was only the failed coup in the USSR of August 1991, and the rapid political changes which followed, which gave hope of breaking the Afghan deadlock. The agreement of 13 September 1991, under which both states would alter their arms supplies with effect from January 1992, meant that there finally appeared to be realistic prospects for a viable political settlement. If nothing else, it would ensure at the very least that the scale and intensity of the conflict would be significantly reduced.

By October, the UN was overseeing moves to establish a transitional government to administer an elective process, based on principles for a peace plan which had won broad agreement from many of the parties to the conflict and their external backers. These included the USSR, the USA, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and China, and a majority of the Mujahedin groups.

The main elements of the plan were:

- 1 the need for transitional arrangements acceptable to the majority of the Afghan people, including the establishment of a credible and impartial transition mechanism, with appropriate powers, which could provide the security for the holding of free and fair elections;
- 2 a cessation of hostilities during the transition period;
- 3 UN and other international assistance during the transition period and the electoral process;
- 4 an agreement to end arms supplies to all Afghan sides, to be implemented along with the transition arrangements;
- 5 the need for adequate financial and material resources to aid refugees, voluntary repatriation, and economic and social reconstruction inside Afghanistan.

There are obvious problems in the implementation of the plan. The mechanism of the transition has still to be determined. The most serious stumbling block is the role of Najibullah and other leading members of the Kabul government during the transition period. There is a growing consensus among the external backers that he must leave power, but little notion of how this might be effected. One possible solution is the return of the former King, Zahir Shah, to head an interim government. However, if Najibullah were to depart before a viable transition government were to be in place, then a power vacuum would result, which many warring factions would struggle to fill.

In addition, even if there is a formal agreement on the peace process, it is possible that some Mujahedin groups will continue fighting both a government in Kabul and other Mujahedin. Local commanders, who have gained sway over considerable areas of Afghanistan, may be reluctant to relinquish power to a central government. While the repatriation of the five million refugees should be a major element in the scheme, a possible food shortage (in part because of a shortfall in Soviet food aid), extensive destruction of infrastructure, the presence of hundreds of thousands of live mines and continuing insecurity in the countryside are long-term problems.

## The collapse of the USSR

By December 1991, the USSR itself was no longer a viable state as the dominant Russian government decisively triumphed over the central government, and its remaining republics joined a loose Confederation of Independent States (CIS). The Russian government took over the Security Council seat and the previous international obligations of the former Soviet government, pledging to continue efforts towards a negotiated peace in Afghanistan. However grave economic problems and ethnic tensions within the CIS limited their influence.

The independence of the Central Asian republics means that their interests in Afghanistan are diverging from those of the Russians. The Communist governments who still rule in most of these republics are fearful of Islamic fundamentalism spreading in the region. Cross-border ethnic ties may also become an issue; for example the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, has stated that Uzbekistan has a responsibility towards Uzbeks living in Afghanistan.

The emergence of the new Central Asian states has opened new economic opportunities for Afghans. Although their own country has been economically devastated, it provides a trading lifeline between Central Asia, the Indian sub-continent and Iran – a reopening of the Silk Road, under a private, and sometimes illegal, guise. Both barter and hard currency deals are thriving, with Afghan traders leading the way. A less welcome trade is that of opium based products: according to UN officials Afghanistan has become the world's leading producer of opium. Not only does the crop finance Mujahedin and other warlords, but rising prices within the country have meant that many Afghan women and children use opium to ward off hunger pangs.

A political settlement would promote productive trading and economic activity and encourage a return to food and other useful crops. If the UN Plan were to come to fruition, Afghanistan might avoid a further disintegration into chaos.

## The Afghan perspective

To conclude, the Afghan crisis has become an international crisis. There are too many hands playing in the game, and this minimizes the chances of any solution being reached by the Afghans themselves. As long as foreign intervention continues both inside and outside Afghanistan, there is little chance for national reconciliation and resolution of the crisis within the country.

Even in the light of a possible solution and the establishment of a central government to replace the present one, there is no guarantee that the civil war will cease. The political and religious fragmentation has left such a deep scar that it will take years, if not decades, to resolve the conflicts and differences. Afghanistan, through foreign intervention, has been divided into regions controlled by warlords who have fought for the last 12 years or so, and who will not be prepared to compromise on their demands with any central government.

During the war, many other issues have emerged in Afghanistan. People have recognized the mismanagement of the country, and its underdevelopment by the former governments and monarchies. Social, political and minority rights as well as other demands have often surfaced during the liberation war. Therefore any central government imposed from outside is doomed to fail unless it is recognized by the people. It must respect and accept the legitimate rights of all factions and elements among the population in order to succeed.

The way a peaceful solution might be achieved seems to be the re-establishment and restoration of the traditional social and political structure, based on democratic norms, consensus, and compromise. Although the system has been abused by former governments in order to extend their power into the rural areas, the roots of peaceful co-existence are there, and the Afghans remain capable of solving their own problems – if they are left alone to do so.

As an old Afghan man said to the author during a trip to Logar Province in autumn 1989:

*‘It is easier to handle your enemies than your friends. For your enemy says he is your enemy and you know how to get rid of him. But often it is difficult to know who is your friend and who is not. Therefore it is much more difficult to get rid of unwanted friends.’*



## CONCLUSIONS

International intervention and interference (by the USA, the USSR, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran etc.) has affected the Afghans socially and politically and resulted in further fragmentation through religious and political interference in a country already fragmented ethnically. New divisions caused by religious and political fragmentation have been added to those already in existence.

As a result of the repercussions of the Islamic influence on the war, Muslim families were divided among the various Afghan political parties (all claiming to be Islamic but fighting with each other), but they also suffered external enforcement of religious doctrines, eg. Iranian interference in the Shiite community, Pakistani interference in the Sunni community, Wahabism, etc. The Islamic cause was further enforced not only by the direct influence of Muslim countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, etc.), but also by outside support (including China and the USA).

The USSR remained active not only on the military front, but also had politically, socially and in development effects. An obvious example is the Sovietization of all public and education sectors. A Soviet-type political education programme became more important than technical qualifications and the USSR invested a large amount of resources in this field – ultimately with little long-term economic return for either themselves or the regime in Kabul.

Without an appropriate long-term development plan, there is a great danger that humanitarian assistance will increase dependency, particularly among the vulnerable groups (the five million refugees and the two to three million internally displaced people), and may well result in a major disaster, including a huge increase in urban slums in Afghanistan’s cities and towns.

One million dead and between 200,000 and 300,000 disabled people are going to remain a deep scar in the country’s history. Millions of people have been deprived of their basic rights to live in their own environment, which has produced an immense psychological effect on the population.

There are few skilled and qualified Afghans available for the nation’s reconstruction. It will need to utilize the active participation of women, who now make up the majority of the population. In order to safeguard the honour of the women, further restrictions have been placed upon them in order to protect them. Yet it is the women and children who have suffered most severely.

All this is exacerbated by the presence of a young generation, in the countryside and in the refugee camps, which has been split geographically and ideologically. A whole generation has been deprived of the right to education. Even before the war, Afghanistan had been severely handicapped by the almost total lack of formal education. A recent UNICEF assessment on *Education in Afghanistan* has indicated that:

*‘The demand for educational assistance in the country exceeds the current ability of agencies to support programmes due to manpower, financial and logistic constraints.’<sup>237</sup>*

The dependency syndrome is seen more clearly among the refugees in Pakistan than the others. A friend of the author who wrote a paper recently on the involvement of women in income-generation schemes and the role of their children in the reconstruction process, describes the fate of the refugees with a true story from a classroom in a refugee camp in Pakistan:

*‘The classroom was full of young Afghan boys armed with coloured pencils and empty sheets of paper. They were told to draw pictures about their future, so from their memories and dreams they began to depict the scenes they imagined. The expected images were revealed – airplane pilots, helicopter gunship pilots, mujahedin with big guns, etc. However, in the pile of papers, one had an image that was distinctly different than the others. It was a picture of bright flowers, some trees and a green garden. When the teacher began to talk and look through the pictures with the children, he discovered that amid this room full of future fighters and mujahids and pilots there was only one who would like to be a gardener. The question was asked: ‘How will you eat then and where will you get your food?’ The answer came back: ‘We have our rations!’*

Rural populations have become urbanized and urban-dwellers had to give up most of the advantages which they enjoyed in the cities and accept restrictions enforced by the war – economically, socially and otherwise.

The future generation has had strange cultures imposed upon it. It has experienced social life in the host countries and has adopted foreign culture, language and social aspects which people will carry with them when they repatriate. This is another cause for further fragmentation. Ethnic and tribal values have been replaced with religious and political values.

Yet many positive changes have also taken place which, together with the rehabilitation of the social and cultural structures, provide the potential for a smooth and peaceful rehabilitation and reconstruction process:

- Through the war different Afghan ethnic and tribal groups have come together inside Afghanistan and in Pakistan and Iran, and have learned how to live beside each other on the basis of peaceful coexistence;
- In order to safeguard their social values, ie. honour, dignity and pride, both refugees and residents have helped each other more than they would have before the war. For instance, begging and prostitution, which are common in other parts of the world in similar situations, are non-existent among the refugees and in Afghanistan.
- Afghan refugees, especially in Pakistan and Iran, also had to face the outside world and accept and respect the values of their host countries and start to understand openness towards life-styles different to their own – some have even adopted these styles.

- In the refugee camps and in towns and cities outside their villages, many Afghans were able to use certain facilities such as medical care, education (even if limited) and access to infrastructure which they will miss when they return to their home villages. This may create a demand for social services, even if, to be effective, they have to be operated in the community’s own way;
- Afghans have also learned how to take advantage of aid from the international community without allowing them to interfere in their lives. This should have given a salutary lesson to the international community – effective help works when it avoids outside radical changes and is sensitive to Afghan needs and wishes;
- The limited number of refugees who managed to establish themselves in their host countries, and acquire new skills and became self-sufficient, has proved that they are hard-working and have the potential to help themselves to rehabilitate and reconstruct their war-torn country – if they are given the chance and are left alone.

On the one hand, there is a struggle for re-creation of the traditional political and social structure on a democratic basis, by the majority of civilians and commanders inside Afghanistan; on the other hand, there has been the establishment outside Afghanistan of political parties, created by its neighbours and massively supported by other states. Under such circumstances can a UN-brokered settlement provide a plan for a viable peace?

The only answer to a peaceful political solution is the restoration of the traditional Afghan political structure, based on consensus and national reconciliation, with respect for and acceptance of all minorities and their rights. The consensus will be more difficult to achieve than in the past because of Afghan’s society’s increased fragmentation, but this is where outsiders should concentrate their efforts. Any process towards national reconciliation will need an immense amount of time and patience, but the following two Afghan proverbs show where wisdom lies:

*‘Hurry is the work of the devil’*

and

*‘Patience is bitter but bears sweet fruits.’*



## IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

Afghanistan is a highly complex country, with enormous problems, greatly exacerbated by the intervention of outside powers. There are no simple or easy solutions, but the following recommendations offer some guidelines for working towards a more peaceful future for Afghanistan and all its diverse peoples.

### Urgent short-term needs

- The international community must ensure the provision of **urgent humanitarian relief**, particularly food aid, to all Afghans in need, whether inside or outside the country.
- **No military aid or technical assistance** should be given by any outside power to any political party or military force, under the pretext of humanitarian aid.
- **Aid should be distributed fairly, representatively and on the basis of need.**
- All humanitarian aid should be **given and registered openly** by the donor nations and agencies and its distribution should be monitored by an impartial and independent UN-sponsored international agency.
- Wherever appropriate, **indigenous democratic grass-roots Afghan organizations and institutions** (particularly in the rural areas) should be involved in the distribution of humanitarian aid.
- Wherever appropriate, **independent Non-Government Organizations** (NGOs) should be involved in the distribution of humanitarian aid. Many NGOs have developed long-term links with specific communities and regions.
- The UN and other agencies should work towards the creation of basic **secure supply routes** and negotiate safe-conduct agreements to allow the supply of urgent food stuffs to reach besieged or isolated civilians.
- There is an urgent need to expand the present international programme to **detect and remove mines** and other discarded military hardware inside Afghanistan. These mines responsible for the continued deaths of many Afghans and their presence is a positive disincentive to the programme of voluntary repatriation of refugees.

### Towards an international political settlement

- There is an urgent need for a **just and peaceful political settlement** in Afghanistan. The UN Plan of October 1991 provides some of the elements of such a settlement. The UN Secretary-General and Member States of the Security Council must give the implementation of this plan their highest priority.
- All political and military parties to the present conflict and the states who have supported them in the past, should give the UN Plan their **fullest backing**.
- All states who have remained politically and militarily uninvolved in the Afghan conflict should use their **good offices** to support the UN peace plan.

- Any central government which has been imposed from the outside is doomed to fail unless it is recognized by the majority of Afghans and respects the legitimate rights of all the various minority peoples.

### Long-term economic needs

- There should be a comprehensive evaluation by indigenous Afghan agencies and groups, in conjunction with donor agencies, of Afghanistan's long-term economic needs, in order to formulate a coherent plan for the **reconstruction of the Afghan economy**, and to present this plan to the international community for consideration.
- There should be **substantial long-term investment** by the international community in Afghanistan, in particular the repair and construction of development infrastructure, especially **transport, health and education** facilities.
- Food aid should be limited to urgent short-term humanitarian situations and to assist during reconstruction and development. Experience from other areas of the world shows that long-term food aid can create dependency and hamper long-term development.
- Afghanistan has a desperate need for **professional and other skilled workers**. Expatriate Afghans should be encouraged to return to contribute to the reconstruction process. There will also be a need for technical expatriate assistance, both to fill the skills gap and to train Afghans.
- Urgent consideration must be paid to the education and training of **women and girls**, who today form the majority of the Afghan population.
- Specific programmes of training and education should be devised to aid the rehabilitation of **people with disabilities**, with the aim that they should be fully or partially self-supporting.
- A **census** should be taken to assess accurately the size, composition and concentration of the whole Afghan population (ie. including refugees) by ethnic group, religious confession and gender, in order to work towards a fair division of national income and to ensure no group feels unjustly treated.
- Returning refugees and internally displaced people should be encouraged to resettle in the countryside, rather than the cities, if it is safe to do so. Afghanistan will remain a very poor country for a long time to come; it should encourage **rural-oriented development** rather than city-based growth.

## Human rights

- The establishment of an administration based upon **law and justice** should be a priority in any political settlement. Afghans should not be forced to accept unsuitable outside models, but should build upon long-standing indigenous models, which already exist in some areas, and which have considerable potential for long-term change and development.
- There should be **responsible control** over the military and armed militias, with their authority taken over by broadly-based democratic local institutions.
- All parties to the conflict should follow the **Geneva Convention** on the treatment of Prisoners of War (POWs) and work towards their release and return to their communities.
- There will need to be special protection for **vulnerable groups**, who may otherwise be exposed to reprisals and vendetta killings. This could be achieved by working towards democratic community-based decision-making and establishment of the rule of law.
- Appropriate action should be taken against the instigators and perpetrators of **human rights abuses**, whether they belong to the Kabul regime or the Mujahedin. The KHAD and any successor organization should be immediately disbanded. All political prisoners should be released, and torture and ill-treatment forbidden.
- The fate of all the **Afghan children taken to the USSR** in the course of the conflict should be determined by an international tracing agency such as the Red Cross/Crescent. Those who wish to be reunited with their parents or to return to Afghanistan should be allowed to do so; those who prefer not to return should have the right to be educated in an Afghan language and culture.
- The **UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan** should continue his valuable reporting task. Any interim or permanent administration should be encouraged to use the UN's Advisory Services on Human Rights.

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