

## **AFGHANISTAN: FOREIGN INTERVENTION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

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The American intervention in Afghanistan and the rapid collapse of the Taliban has introduced an unprecedented western military presence into central Asia which has completely unforeseen consequences for its peoples.

For the Afghans the American invasion is the latest in the long line of foreign interventions that can be traced back to the role of the British in the foundation and consolidation of the Afghan state. Afghans, however, have tended not to be the passive victims of foreign designs. Not only do they have a long tradition of resistance to foreign invaders, but also foreign influence and intervention have generally been appropriated and used by some groups in order to consolidate their power within a divided country, with effects that have usually rebounded on the foreign power. The debacle of Pakistan's strategy of promoting the Taliban as a protégé with which to transform Afghanistan into its satellite is the latest example of such a reversal and, perhaps, not the last one.

### ***1 INVENTING AFGHANISTAN***

"Its all the fault of the British."

(Persian proverb.)

"They have no name for their country", wrote the Scotsman who was sent as the first British ambassador to the court of the Emir of Kabul in 1809.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone, *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul*, Oxford University Press, 1972, first published 1815, vol 1, p 200.

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A century later the country of Afghanistan did have a name, and it also had borders, "scientific frontiers" which had been drawn up by the British themselves. The Afghan king, financed and supported by the British, was attempting to impose order on a country that was still riven by tribal and ethnic fragmentation. Many of Afghanistan's peoples still did not even see themselves as being "Afghans". However they had begun to develop a common identity as a consequence of decades of conflict with the British, notably in two Anglo-Afghan wars.

In this sense modern Afghanistan "was created both by the British and against them".<sup>2</sup> More particularly, although the country was never colonised, the Afghan state was the product of the contention and collusion between two colonialisms, British and Russian, in shifting alliances with local collaborating rulers, in what the British called the "great game" of rivalry which was played out between the two throughout the nineteenth century.

Afghanistan's founding legends, or myths, centre on both the establishment of the Afghan state, and on the struggle against British, and also Russian, colonialism.

### **THE DURRANI EMPIRE**

According to this legend - whose latest avatar was invoked in June 2002 - a loya jirga (grand council) of the Abdali Pashtun tribal confederation was convened in 1747 and its members decided to set up their own kingdom, with Ahmad Khan as their king.<sup>3</sup> For several centuries their territory had been fought over by the Persian Safavid empire to the west and the Moghul empire to the east, each supported by different mercenary tribes. But by the middle of the eighteenth century these empires were in terminal decline. In their absence Ahmad Shah led the Durrani - as the Abdalis renamed themselves - and forged a unity among most of the usually factious Durrani clans<sup>4</sup> in a process of

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Barry, *Le Royaume de l'Insolence: L'Afghanistan 1504-2001*, Paris, Flammarion, 2002, first edition 1984, p 154.

<sup>3</sup> Vartan Gregorian, *The Formation of Modern Afghanistan*, Stanford University Press, 1969, pp 46 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Divisions which were lamented by the seventeenth century warrior poet Khushal Khan Khattak:

conquest which established the Durrani tribal empire, which extended from Persia to India.<sup>5</sup>

External resistance, especially from the Sikhs to the east, blocked the expansion of the empire and then began to force it back to the land of its origins. This in turn encouraged the outbreak of internal revolts and civil wars. When the British first arrived they recognised, behind the pomp of the court, the signs of an empire in disintegration, decline and decay. The development of maritime trade routes had led to the decline of overland trade from which Afghan cities had in the past grown rich. Many of these cities had been devastated by Mongol invasions. The Durrani had lost control of the rich Indian regions from which they drew three quarters of their tribute and taxes.<sup>6</sup> Political fragmentation meant that the Afghan kings were unable to extract taxes from the powerful khans, which was to make them easily susceptible to accepting British financial subsidies. Economically, Afghanistan had nothing to offer Britain in terms of agricultural or mineral wealth. Rather its significance lay in its strategic position as a buffer between India, the jewel of the British empire, and the southward expansion of Russia.

#### WARS WITH THE BRITISH

So when in the 1830s an alliance developed between Russia and Persia, the British invaded Afghanistan to force their own favoured candidate, thought to be

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"More skilled in the swords are the Pathans than the Moghals,  
Would only more intelligence was theirs,  
Were the tribes but of agreement amongst themselves,  
Emperors would prefer to bow before them."

Quoted in Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan*, op cit., p 43.

And also noted, this time rather less prosaically, by a British general in the nineteenth century:

"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 Afghans, for there is no common country."

Sir Henry Rawlinson, *Britain and Russia in the East*, London, John Murray, DATE, p 355.

5 "For the consolidation of his powers at home he (the king) relies in great measure on the effects of his foreign wars." Elphinstone, *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul*, vol 2, DATE, p 283.

6 according to Yuri Gankovsky, "The Durrani Empire", in *Afghanistan: Past and Present*, Moscow, 1981, p 88.

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less pro-Russian than the incumbent, onto the Afghan throne. This led to the first Anglo-Afghan war (1839-42). With the king in exile in India, Afghans rose in a jihad called by the religious ulema. The British were forced to evacuate Kabul and the "army of the Indus" was destroyed by the Afghans as it retreated to Jalalabad. Only a handful out of sixteen thousand survived in the biggest British military disaster of the nineteenth century.

In this struggle, the ulema proved themselves more crucial than the exiled king or the tribal khans. The intensity of religious beliefs among the Afghans and their grip over everyday life was well attested to.<sup>7</sup> All Afghans are Muslims, and over 80% are Sunni Muslims. All Afghan rulers in the nineteenth century attempted to legitimise their rule by portraying themselves as defenders of the faith. Even after the 1978 coup, the Khalqi communists had to cloak their policies in the language of Islam. Afghanistan is a predominantly Sunni country and so does not have an organised clergy, unlike Shiite Iran. The ulema ("mad mullahs" to the British) are religious scholars, external to the tribal structure. But in crucial moments of crisis - especially in times of foreign invasion - Islam has been able to play a political role by transcending tribal divisions and uniting an otherwise divided people.<sup>8</sup> It was to be the same following the Russian invasion in 1979 when new figures emerged to lead the resistance as the king was on permanent vacation in exile in Italy and most of the aristocracy had fled the country. But the fight against foreign colonialism was a struggle in defence of the Islamic community - the umma - and not simply a form of state inspired patriotism. Thus Afghanistan's nineteenth century rulers fought not only to subdue tribal rebellion, but also to tame and institutionalise the power of the ulema and of Islam.

The British learnt from their defeat. Rather than trying to impose a king of their choice, they bought off the existing one with financial subsidies. On his return from India Dost Mohammed was prepared to break all ties with Russia in exchange for a subsidy of an estimated £200,000 a year.<sup>9</sup> During the war his

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7 "From their conversation, one would think that the whole people, from the king to the lowest, was always occupied in holy reflections." Elphinstone, op cit., **PAGE No**

8 Oliver Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p 59.

9 Michael Barry, op cit., p 156.

authority had disintegrated. Over the following several decades he and his successor attempted to re-establish state control over the country, especially in the non-Pashtun areas to the north and the west.

#### **ABDUR RAHMAN KHAN**

Tsarist military conquests in central Asia after 1865 persuaded the British to re-occupy the country in 1878, so provoking the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-80). The British forced the Afghans to accept the humiliating Treaty of Gandamak, which made the country a virtual British protectorate for forty years. But although the British managed to occupy some of the towns, the religious ulema again summoned the people to revolt. The British were forced to withdraw after eighteen months. They recognised a new king, Abdur Rahman, and provided him with money and arms. The "Iron Amir" spent the next twenty years suppressing tribal revolts and undermining the power of religious leaders. He left the elements of a centralised army and a state bureaucracy and administration, which were to last into the 1970s. Centralisation did not, however, undermine the power of the aristocracy as a class, or favour the development of capitalism.

While Abdur Rahman was imposing order internally the British, in a series of negotiations with the Russians, drew up Afghanistan's northern borders, which were confirmed by the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 without consulting the Afghans. In addition Britain unilaterally demarcated Afghanistan's borders with Persia and India. These borders defined Afghanistan as a buffer state which stood between the limits of the British and Russian empires. They were based on purely strategic considerations and corresponded to no known historical or ethnic frontiers. The various boundary commissions had one thing in common: "a genius for drawing a boundary in a wrong place, and we still live with the results of their decisions".<sup>10</sup> Particularly controversial was the Durand Line

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10 Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton University Press, 1980, first published 1973, p 422. According to Sir Thomas Holdich, head of the Russo-Afghan Border Commission: "we have contributed much to give a national unity to that nebulous community which we call Afghanistan...by drawing a boundary all round it and elevating it to the position of a buffer state between England and Russia."

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which was drawn up in 1893 to demarcate Afghanistan and India. It was drawn up according to a theory of "scientific frontiers", which ultimately boiled down to "the most defensible boundary for India".<sup>11</sup> It had the effect of dividing the troublesome Pashtun tribes who nevertheless ignored it for much of the twentieth century except when it suited them, for example for smuggling purposes. Imposed on the Afghans, it was never fully accepted by them, and after the formation of Pakistan in 1947 it was the basis of Afghan claims for a reunified Pashtunistan within Afghan borders.

### ETHNICITIES

Afghanistan's complex ethnic mix is a product of the way its borders were drawn up. Only the Shiite Hazaras (10-15% of the population of an estimated 15-20 million)<sup>12</sup> live exclusively within the borders of Afghanistan. About eight to nine million Pashtuns (40 - 50%) live in Afghanistan, with a similar number living across the border in Pakistan. Persian speaking (but Sunni Muslim) Tajiks (about 30%) live in the large cities and the north. Turkish speaking groups such as Uzbeks (10%) and Turkmens live to the north. Recent surveys list as many as 55 ethnic groups in total.<sup>13</sup> The population of the non-Pashtun groups was augmented by refugees (muhajirin) who fled from the Soviet Union following the collapse of the anti-Bolshevik Basmachi movement in the 1920s and from Stalin's forced collectivisation in the 1930s. Inevitably many of these peoples in northern Afghanistan were hostile to all forms of socialist propaganda as a result.<sup>14</sup>

Pashtuns have, of course, been dominant throughout the history of Afghanistan. For a long time the terms Pashtun and Afghan were synonymous. It is among Pashtuns that tribal organisation is strong. The state, which emerged after 1747, was a tribal state and from 1747 to 1978 the rulers of Afghanistan belonged to

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11 Rob Hager in Richard Tapper (ed), *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, Croon Helm, 1983 p 102.

12 all these figures are guestimates, and are the subject of conflicting definitions and claims.

13 William Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, Blackwell, 2002, p 16 ff.

14 M. Nazif Shahrani, "Responses to the Saur Revolution in Badakshan", in M. Nazif Shahrani and Robert Canfield (eds), *Revolutions and Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives*, University of California, 1984, p 143.

the Durrani confederation of Pashtun tribes, except for a brief period in 1929. Since 1818 they were all members of the Mohammadzai clan of the Barakzai tribe. This doesn't mean that their power was not contested. On the contrary, the history of Afghan feudalism after 1747 was a history of political fragmentation, tribal rebellions and repeated and usually frustrated attempts by the state to impose an absolutist centralisation. However if in everyday life an individual's ethnicity is an observable part of their identity, this does not mean that ethnicity itself is always a stake in political struggles. On the contrary, it becomes so only in specific conjunctures, for example after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.

From this history of resistance and war has emerged the reputation of Afghanistan as Yaghestan, or "land of rebellion". According to Barth, an anthropologist,<sup>15</sup> the Pashtuns contrast hokumat ("the administered lands with an organised government") and Yaghestan ("the lands of freedom and rebellion"), the plains where despotism rules and revolts are rare, with the mountains where resistance to oppression is always possible.<sup>16</sup> Yaghestan is not a class resistance. Exploitation (rents and labour services due to landowners who control the supply of water and animals), as well as the debts of the sharecroppers, may be harsher than on the plains. The power of Yaghestan is negative: while capable of rebellion, it is incapable of founding an alternative society.<sup>17</sup> And even though tribal and ethnic groups continually try to colonise and use the state in their interests, the ideology of Yaghestan indicates the exteriority between the state and the daily lives of Afghan peasants.<sup>18</sup> This was the basis of the resistance to the PDPA's "revolution from above" and to the Soviet invasion.

In May 1919 a third Anglo-Afghan war broke out. This time a new Amir, Amanullah Khan, took advantage of a conjuncture of imperial weakness analogous to that of 1747 to launch his own jihad against the British and to

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15 Frederik Barth, *Political Leadership Among the Swat Pathans*, London, The Athlone Press, 1998, first published 1959, p 133.

16 Carlton Coon compares these "lands of insolence" to those of the Kurds and the Berbers: *Caravan: The Story of the Middle East*, London, Jonathon Cape, 1951, pp 295-323.

17 cf the analysis in Barry, op cit., p 96 ff.

18 Cf Roy, op cit., 1986, p 10 ff.

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declare Afghan independence. The fighting was rather inconclusive, and for the first time Afghan cities were bombed from the air, but things went badly enough for the British to force them to recognise Afghan sovereignty (although they immediately withdrew their financial subsidies to the government).

### 2 COMMUNISTS AND ISLAMISTS

"Our great leader hit upon the truth that due to the fact that in developing nations the working class has not yet developed as a political force, there is another force which can overturn the feudal and oppressive government, and in Afghanistan that force was the army."

Hafizullah Amin, 1979

Until the 1960s there was no open opposition to the "feudal" system which the Afghan students denounced, using the European term. Perhaps potential reformers were warned off by the fate of the "enlightened despot" King Amanullah in the 1920s. Certainly the communists were obsessed by his failure and determined not to repeat it.

After his accession to power in 1919, Amanullah attempted to westernise the country and to modernise it "from above", following the examples of Attaturk in Turkey and Reza Shah in Iran. He proposed a plethora of political, social and economic reforms to extend education and literacy to the whole population, give equal rights to women, introduce land reforms, democratise the political system and separate the state from religion. But a series of tribal rebellions led by landowners and khans who were opposed to the reforms was transformed into a nation-wide revolt when the ulema declared a jihad. In 1929, as the power of the state disintegrated, the king was forced into exile and a Tajik warlord seized power in Kabul. After eight months he was overthrown by the Pashtun tribes, supported by the British, and executed.<sup>19</sup>

From 1929 to 1978 members of the Musahiban family ruled Afghanistan. The present king, who has just been brought back to Afghanistan, came to the throne

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<sup>19</sup> Leon Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919-1929*, Cornell University Press, 1973.

as a teenager in 1933, but for three decades he "reigned but did not rule".<sup>20</sup> His uncles exercised power until 1953 and his cousin, Prime Minister Daoud, held power until 1963. His own decade of direct rule ended in 1973 when he fled to Italy "for medical treatment" as famine ravaged the country and officials and merchants grew rich from selling foreign food aid on the black market. While in Italy he learned that his cousin Daoud had taken power in a bloodless military coup and that the monarchy had been abolished.

Afghanistan under the Musahiban family remained one of the poorest countries in the world. From its inception it relied on the support of the Pashtun land-owning aristocracy. State taxes on the landowners were abolished. In order to raise revenue, needed especially for the armed forces, the state taxed merchants and foreign trade. After the war it sought foreign loans and aid from the USA and, when the USA seemed to lose interest, from the USSR. Almost half the country's finances came from foreign aid. It sought to Pashtunise the state administration by appointing Pashtuns to key positions. It gave government contracts to Pashtuns and targeted development aid to Pashtun areas. Despite the state's modernising rhetoric, industrialisation was minimal: in the 1960s the industrial workforce numbered less than 50,000 people.<sup>21</sup>

### THE PDPA

The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan was formed in 1965.<sup>22</sup> No communist party had been formed in Afghanistan following the 1917 Russian revolution, unlike in other Asian countries. Internally Afghanistan had no radical workers or peasants movement. Some of the PDPA founding members had been active in Awakened Youth, a small reformist movement of intellectuals, and had been jailed or exiled for their role in it, but Afghanistan had no tradition of Marxism. In the 1920s the Soviet Union seemed content to support Amanullah. For Stalin in 1924:

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<sup>20</sup> Dupree, *op cit.*, p 477.

<sup>21</sup> Maxwell Fry, *The Afghan Economy*, Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1974, p 12. This officially commissioned report diplomatically notes the "absence of general support for development efforts" (p 215).

<sup>22</sup> cf Oliver Roy, "The Origins of the Afghan Communist Party", *Central Asian Survey*, vol 7, number 2/3, 1988, pp 41-57.

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The struggle of the Emir of Afghanistan for the independence of Afghanistan is an objectively revolutionary struggle, in spite of the monarchistic cast of the views of the Emir and his associates since it weakens, disunites and undermines imperialism...<sup>23</sup>

The immediate goals of the PDPA were to overthrow the "economic and political hegemony of the feudal class"<sup>24</sup> through a "national democratic revolution" following a "non-capitalist path", echoing the language of pro-Soviet parties throughout the Third World. Soon after it began publication the PDPA's newspaper Khalq was banned. Some blamed the paper itself for being too leftist, and a split in the central committee on the issue led to the formation of two completely separate organisations: Khalq (the Masses) led by its general secretary Nur Muhammad Taraki and by Hafizullah Amin, and Parcham (Flag) led by Babrak Karmal.

The differences between the two were hard to detect since from their statements both seemed committed to the same strategy and tactics. In general Parcham was more reformist in its approach, wanting to work with the "progressive wing" of the ruling class, while Khalq were more "insurrectionist". Dubbed the "royal communist party" after it declared that the Zahir Shah was the "most progressive king in Asia", Parcham also had a reputation for being slavishly pro-Soviet. Parchamis such as Babrak Karmal came from the Durrani aristocracy, while Khalqis such as Taraki and Amin came from poorer backgrounds and were Ghilzais, the traditional rivals of the dominant Durrani. The Khalqis liked to pose as more leftist and more independent of the Soviet Union. In words which must have come as some surprise to his Soviet backers, Amin declared in 1979 that:

Prior to our revolution the working classes everywhere wanted to follow in the footprints of the Great October Socialist Revolution. However, after the Great

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23 quoted in Hélène Carrère d'Encausse and Stuart R. Schram (eds), *Marxism and Asia*, Allen Lane, p 186.

24 from the PDPA's Platform, 1965, in Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan's Two Party Communism: Parcham and Khalq*, California, Hoover Press, 1983, pp 137-148.

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April (Saur ) Revolution the toilers should know that there does exist a shortcut which can transfer power from the feudal class to the working class and our revolution proved it.<sup>25</sup>

However this skipping of stages depended not on an uprising of the exploited classes, but on a revolt within the armed forces:

Our great leader hit upon the truth that due to the fact that in developing nations the working class has not yet developed as a political force, there is another force which can overturn the feudal and oppressive government, and in Afghanistan that force was the army.<sup>26</sup>

Faced with a minuscule working class and an indifferent peasantry Khalq and Parcham recruited mostly among students, teachers, civil servants etc. They also recruited heavily among the armed forces, which were Soviet trained, many within the Soviet Union itself. In general their supporters were less interested in socialism or classlessness than in modernisation and the overcoming of backwardness. The main obstacle to achieving these objectives was not only the backwardness of the regime, but also the backwardness and the ignorance of the people. The attraction of the Soviet Union lay in its state control of the economy, the power of the state bureaucracy and the leading role of the intellectual-bureaucrats within it.

In the short term it was Parcham which flourished, with its own legal newspaper, parliamentary work which secured it publicity and recruits among students and in the state administration, and, last but not least, Soviet support. Parchami officers had been heavily involved in Daoud's 1973 coup, and Parcham was rewarded with posts in the ministries, whereas Khalq was sidelined. But, inspired by the success of Daoud's coup, Khalq redoubled its work of recruiting in the army. In the 1970s Daoud publicly moved away from the Soviet Union, encouraged by oil rich countries of the middle east such as Iran. He established closer relations with the Shah of Iran and mended his fences with Pakistan over the Pashtunistan issue. Top Parchamis started to lose their

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25 Quoted in Hafizullah Emadi, *State, Revolution and Superpowers in Afghanistan*, Praeger, 1990, p 80.

26 *Kabul Times*, 14-4-79, quoted in, Roy, *op cit.*, 1986 p 85.

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positions in the government and the armed forces. The Soviet Union probably saw him as another third world dictator who was slipping from their grasp, just as Saddam Hussein had done in Iraq or Sadat in Egypt. The USSR in 1977 sponsored a 'reconciliation' between Khalq and Parcham in 1977. However, by this time Khalq had three times as many supporters as Parcham and was clearly the more attractive proposition. Already its officers in the armed forces were preparing a coup to get rid of Daoud. On the 27th April 1978 they seized power. This was the "Great Saur [April] Revolution".

### THE ISLAMISTS

The Islamist movement had its origins in the 1950s in the Faculty of Theology at Kabul University. Some of the teachers - "the professors" - became influenced by the ideas of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood after studying in Egypt.<sup>27</sup> In the 1960s students organised clandestine discussion cells, and began to preach sermons and build mosques. They denounced both westernisation (alcohol, un-Islamic dress for women etc) and the government's ties to the Soviet Union. They protested against the influence of Marxism among other students, and physically attacked leftist demonstrations. Known as the Ikwaniis ["the Brothers"] to their opponents, they were organised in the Moslem Youth Movement and had sufficient support to win student elections in Kabul in 1970.<sup>28</sup>

Their more reactionary policies, especially on women, led their opponents to denounce them as "feudalists". But the Afghan movement was part of a broader movement of modernist political Islamism which transformed the political landscape throughout the Middle East and Asia in the 60s and 70s.<sup>29</sup>

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27 The Muslim Brotherhood had been set up in the late 1920s and demanded the setting up of an Islamic state to apply the sharia: "The Koran is our constitution". cf Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: the Trail of Political Islam*, I. B. Taurus, 2002, p 27 ff.

28 Roy, op cit., 1986, chapter 4, and David B. Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad*, University of California Press, 2002, ch 6.

29 in the West these movements are often labelled "fundamentalist", which is misleading and obscure their originality, since fundamentalist movements demanding a "return to the texts" and the rigid application of sharia have existed throughout the history of Islam.

The Islamists were vehemently opposed to cultural westernisation, but were in favour of the appropriation of western science and technology. They saw Islam as a political ideology and advocated Islamic government as the key to Islamicising society. In this sense they represented a departure from more traditionalist Islam, which sought to Islamicise society without necessarily wanting, or even expecting, an Islamic state. Rather than a reaction against the modernisation of Muslim societies, Islamism was a product of it: "Islamism is the Sharia plus electricity".<sup>30</sup>

So in Afghanistan Islamism too was a student phenomenon in an overwhelmingly rural society. None of its militants came from the ruling class.<sup>31</sup> They came from provincial backgrounds, but were educated in state schools, not traditional schools. Most of their student recruits were drawn from technical or engineering faculties or teacher training colleges, not theology faculties. They recruited women and were strongly in favour of secondary and higher education for girls (which brought them into conflict with traditionalists and, later, with the Taliban), even if girls should be segregated and veiled. They accused the ulema of being the allies and apologists of the regime. They denounced the monarchy and the government for being "corrupt" and "illegitimate". Many even compared the Mushabian unfavourably to Amanullah, since he had favoured enlightenment, was non-aligned internationally and was not corrupt.<sup>32</sup> They rejected secular Afghan nationalism, particularly the demand for a reunified Pashtunistan, which made them very attractive to the Pakistani government. And the key to the islamisation of society lay in political action:

The way of life of the people is not established on the basis of its beliefs [in Islam]...The economic system of Afghanistan is a summary of all the corruptions, tyrannical practices, and injustices of all the un-Islamic orders and systems.<sup>33</sup>

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30 Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, I. B. Taurus, 1994, pp 50-52.

31 Cf **INITIAL** Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, **DATE**, pp 90-98.

32 cf Asta Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*, Curzon Press, 1995, p 239.

33 From the programme of the Hezb-I Islami quoted in Rubin *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* p 88

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"The reform of the government is the precondition for the reform of both society and of the individual."<sup>34</sup> To the Islamists class struggle was an alien concept imported from abroad. Their economic programme, such as it was, remained an abstract combination of Islamic banking, the defence of private property and the profit motive (sometimes accompanied by some nationalisations), and social justice for the poor.

In the early 1970s the Islamists decided to start working outside the university and the colleges. Imitating the communists, they began to infiltrate the state apparatuses, particularly education and defence. And they started to take their version of Islam to the peasantry, over the heads of traditional rural religious leaders. For this they began to suffer state repression, which greatly increased after Daoud's 1973 coup. In response, in July 1975, with Pakistani support, they tried to organise armed uprisings in the countryside. These completely failed due to lack of support. Islamism from above attracted no more support amongst the peasantry than socialism from above was to do. Those leaders and militants who managed to escape jail or death were forced into exile in Pakistan.

Here past differences in the movement resulted in a split and the formation of two separate organisations. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was a student activist who had been one of those most in favour of the unsuccessful armed actions. He formed the Hezb-i Islami (Party of Islam). Strong among Pashtuns it was to become a dominant force in the resistance and Hekmatyar was to become Afghanistan's most notorious warlord. The more "moderate" Burhanuddin Rabbani, the future president of Afghanistan and leader of the Northern Alliance, kept the name of Jamiat-I Islami (Islamic Society) and attracted mostly Persian speaking non-Pashtun supporters.

But both groups were now in exile and in isolation. A military coup and a foreign invasion would change their prospects.

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<sup>34</sup> from the programme of Hezb-I Islami, quoted in Barry, op cit., p 79.

## AFGHAN MAOISM

The only Afghan leftists who opposed the 1978 PDPA coup and the Russian invasion were the Maoists.<sup>35</sup> In the 1960s they frequently clashed violently with the Islamists. A distinctive feature of Afghan Maoists was their hostility to Pashtun nationalism and Pashtun domination.<sup>36</sup> Many of their leaders and supporters were Shiia Muslims or came from minority ethnic backgrounds. Many of Kabul's workers were also Tajiks and Hazaras, and the Maoists found it easier to work among them than did the PDPA or the Islamists.<sup>37</sup> In the 1970s they tried to work among the peasantry, but with little success.

They opposed the 1978 coup as a sham revolution from above and denounced the Russian invasion as an imperialist action. For this reason, their numbers were decimated by the pro-Moscow regimes after 1978. The Islamists killed most of those who escaped to the countryside. Most of the Maoist organisations seem to have been destroyed by the early 1980s. Some Maoists - for example the supporters of the Afghan Labour Revolutionary Organisation - managed to survive inside the country.<sup>38</sup> The supporters of RAWA (the Revolutionary Organisation of Women of Afghanistan),<sup>39</sup> who now work among women in the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, also opposed both Islamic fundamentalism and the Russian invasion, and many of them lost their lives as a result.

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35 Emadi, *State, Revolution and superpowers in Afghanistan*, p 103 ff.

36 Dupree, *op cit.*, p 616.

37 cf Raja Anwar, *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*, Verso, 1988, p 58.

38 Interviews with the ALRO can be found on the website of the Labour Party of Pakistan, [www.labourpakistan.org](http://www.labourpakistan.org)

39 [www.rawa.org](http://www.rawa.org)

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### ***3 INVASION AND RESISTANCE***

"The present jihad is not for the watan [homeland], but for Islam - the watan is only khak [dust]"  
Afghan Islamist (1986).

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 in order to rescue a PDPA regime which was on the verge of collapse, confronted by countrywide uprisings and with an army rapidly disintegrating from desertions. It began by killing Hafizullah Amin and most of the Khalqi leadership and brought back Karmal, who had been exiled by Khalq, and installed him into power. By the time the last Soviet soldier had left the country a decade later, an estimated one million Afghans had lost their lives, the vast majority of them civilians killed as their villages were bombed in the Russians' scorched earth policy. Five million refugees fled to Pakistan or Iran, and two million more became refugees inside the country.

When Soviet troops finally left in February 1989 the Soviet Union had suffered its first military defeat since the second world war. Its humiliation undoubtedly contributed to the collapse of the Soviet state itself. Its defeat was a victory for the people of an overwhelmingly rural society who had fought the might of a superpower to a standstill. It was a victory for the USA, which had spent billions financing the resistance, in the cold war. And finally it was a victory for the forces of Islamism internationally, who had also helped financed the resistance and had organised support for it.

Little more than a decade later Afghanistan had been taken over by the Taliban, a movement whose ideals seemed far removed from the professed "modernism" of the Islamists, following a murderous ethnic civil war. The alliance between the Arab leaders and the young Jihadists had collapsed following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. And America was at war with the very Islamic forces it had helped to mobilise and sustain.

## RURAL UPRISINGS

In the course of the Soviet occupation the foreign backed exiled Afghan Islamist groups, although they were bitterly divided among themselves, took over the leadership of the resistance from local traditional leaders.

After the 1978 coup there was no sudden uprising against the new government. The first armed clashes were local responses to the arrival of party members into the villages. Backed with armed force they had come to impose land reforms, to set up schools, or to arrest suspected Daoud loyalists. The party had no history of doing any political work among the peasantry. Rural reform policies it implemented (land redistribution, the abolition of the peasant debts, the abolition of brideprice in marriage, compulsory education), were seen by the peasants as an outside intervention whose effect would be to undermine traditional social structures by strengthening the power of the state.

So the first uprisings were a defence of the local qawm (village community, ethnic or tribal solidarity group) against the armed intervention of the state. The fighting followed the traditional pattern of tribal warfare. After clashing with the party militants, the peasant mojahedin might attack a local government post. But once the territory of the local qawm was liberated the fighting tended to stop.<sup>40</sup>

But the government responded with reprisals: arrests, torture and killings became common and the fighting intensified. The uprisings began in non-Pashtun areas such as Nuristan and among the Hazaras, areas which had come under state control within the last century, against a regime which was seen as being dominated exclusively by Pashtuns. Then they spread to Tajik and Persian speaking areas in the north. Later in 1979 that revolts spread to the tribal Pashtun areas.

The revolts, of course, served to protect the interests of the landowners. But the leaders were local figures,<sup>41</sup> often mullahs,<sup>42</sup> who operated within the popular

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40 cf Roy, op cit., p 106

41 cf M. Nazif Shahrani , "Introduction", in Shahrani and Canfield (eds) *Revolutions and Rebellions in Afghanistan*, p 50.

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tradition of a defensive jihad against infidel intruders. Landowners and khans were not very active. Many had fled, while others preferred stability and compromise to jihad. The armed groups used ancient or captured weapons, and they and their commanders relied on the local community for material support, sometimes supplemented by smuggling or taxing of transport on the roads.<sup>43</sup> But government reprisals and continued fighting demanded more money and arms. This forced local commanders to look to the parties established in exile in Pakistan and their foreign funds.

### THE ISLAMIST PARTIES

In order to manage the influx of refugees that began to flood in from Afghanistan, the Pakistanis turned to the Islamist parties, which had been forced into exile in the 1970s. They soon became the main recipients of money that started to flow in from abroad. In order to get guns and assistance local commanders were forced to ally themselves with one of these parties. With Pakistani assistance Hezb and Jamiat quickly assumed the leadership among the exile groups.

For the Islamists what was principally at stake was not a national liberation struggle but a struggle for Islam, for the umma: "The present jihad is not for the watan [homeland], but for Islam - the watan is only khak [dust]."<sup>44</sup>

Those not subscribing to this objective were excluded from the movement. Pakistan refused to recognise the Pashtun secular nationalists of Afghan Millat. The Maoists were themselves attacked by Islamist groups within Afghanistan. Dissident Khalqis, despite having contacts with the resistance, were not encouraged to join it. In particular, the royalists and supporters of the establishment were marginalised despite their widespread support among the refugees. Pakistan refused to allow members of the royal family onto its territory. Attempts to establish a loya jirga dominated by traditionalists were

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42 M. Hassan Karkar, *Afghanistan: the Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response 1979-1982*, University of California Press, 1995, p 138 ff.

43 Rubin, op cit., DATE, p. 186.

44 Quoted in Olesen, op cit., p 288.

undermined by internal divisions but also by Pakistani hostility.<sup>45</sup> Pakistan recognised seven Sunni exile groups to whom it distributed cash and arms from American and Saudi money and to whom all field commanders had to affiliate in order to get aid. Three of them were traditionalists or "moderates" who favoured a return to the pre-Daoud status quo, which usually included a return of the king. Four of them were "fundamentalist" or "Islamist". They did not want the re-establishment of the monarchy but an Islamic state. The Islamist groups - especially Hekmatyar's Hezb - got the lions share of the money.<sup>46</sup> As a direct result, the fortunes of the royalist and traditionalist groups in Afghanistan declined and the Islamists became stronger.<sup>47</sup>

The foreign Jihadists who came to fight with the mujahedin allied themselves to the Islamists. The initiative to use non-Afghan volunteers came not from the Afghans themselves but was "a joint venture between the Saudis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the [Pakistani Islamist] Jamaat- e- Islami, put together by the ISI",<sup>48</sup> and enthusiastically supported by the CIA. Some 35,000 foreign Jihadists would fight alongside the mujahedin, mostly after the departure of the Soviet troops, and many more came to study and actively support them. Osama bin Laden was the main Saudi organiser in Peshawar.

## FOREIGN FRIENDS

The Afghan war was a war by proxy between the superpowers. By the early 1980s between 100,000 and 150,000 Soviet troops were stationed in Afghanistan, far outnumbering the Afghan army, which never amounted to much more than 30,000. Thousands of Soviet political and military advisers ran the government and the army, sometimes assisted by Iranian Tudeh party members. By the early 1980s the war was costing the Soviet Union an estimated

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45 Karkar, *Afghanistan: the Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response 1979-1982*, DATE, p 97.

46 according to a former brigadier of the I.S.I., Mohammad Yousaf (with Mark Adkin), *The Bear Trap*, Leo Cooper, 1992, p105. Yousaf undoubtedly underestimates the amount of money Hekmatyar received.

47 Roy, *op cit.*, p 129

48 Olivier Roy, quoted in Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, I. B Tauris, 2000, p 130.

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\$5 billion a year.<sup>49</sup> US support for the mujahedin rose dramatically from \$30m per year to a peak of \$600 million dollars a year in the mid 80s, which the Saudis doubled.<sup>50</sup>

Soviet aid to Afghanistan flowed directly to the party and the state. American aid was more indirect. One the one hand the distribution of American financial aid was sub-contracted to Pakistan. On the other hand Saudi Arabia agreed to match US aid dollar for dollar, had its own networks of distribution and organised the sending of foreign volunteers. Both of these regimes had their own agendas, which were to impact on Afghanistan, and the beneficiaries of both were the Pashtun Islamists.

From the beginning of the war Pakistan saw an opportunity to establish a friendly government in Afghanistan which would help to resolve the Pashtunistan issue, and which would give it "strategic depth" in its conflict with India.<sup>51</sup> It was unsympathetic to the royalists or secular Pashtun nationalists because of their past support for a united Pashtunistan within Afghanistan. It distributed money between seven groups because it didn't want a united movement within its borders, on the model of Arafat's P.L.O.

The ISI (Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence) saw to it that Hekmatyar's predominantly Pashtun Hezb got the most money and support.

Saudi Arabia seized on the Afghan issue as a means of re-asserting its leadership in the Islamic world following the Iranian revolution of 1979, and of directing the militancy of the young Islamists against the Soviet Union rather than the USA.<sup>52</sup> The containment of Iranian influence was also, of course, a major US objective. Saudi money especially went to small groups in Afghanistan that shared their anti-Shia Wahhabi doctrines. But money also went to Hekmatyar's group because of its sectarianism towards the non-Sunni groups. The Saudis also

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49 Rubin, op cit., DATE, p 109.

50 Rubin, op cit. DATE, p 196.

51 Rashid, op cit., 2000, p186.

52 Anwar-ul-haq Ahady, "Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Conflict in Afghanistan", in " in William Maley (ed), Fundamentalism Reborn?: Afghanistan and the Taliban, Hurst, 1998 p 118.

funded refugee schools and madrasas in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It was from these that the Taliban were to emerge.

In the event Iran isolated itself from the Afghan mujahedin. It provided support exclusively to the Shia groups, and even formed its own loyal organisations when dissatisfied with the existing ones.

### **CIVIL WAR**

The Soviet Union began to lose the war when the mujahedin started to receive US stinger missiles and got control of the skies, but also when commanders such as Ahmad Shah Massoud began to move from traditional patterns of localised war to mobile guerrilla warfare.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless when the Soviet troops left Afghanistan the mujahedin had yet to capture a major town or city. These were still in the hands of Najibullah and his supporters in the Watan (Homeland) Party, as the PDPA had been re-named in a new spirit of national reconciliation, and were still being supplied by the Russians.

Despite the fact that the mujahedin were not organised for conventional war, the Pakistanis were keen to capture towns and cities in order to impose their influence. But attempts by the ISI to push the mujahedin into capturing cities were a disaster. At Jalalabad the mujahedin lost 10,000 men, their biggest casualties of the war. Finally in April 1992 it was the Jamiat's Massoud, with his largely Tajik militia, which took Kabul, in alliance with the Dostum's Uzbeks and the Hazaras.

Despite Afghanistan's ethnic complexity, ethnicity is not a determining factor in Afghan history, nor is ethnic identity necessarily the basis of political action. But the capture of Kabul intensified a process of ethnic polarisation between the mujahedin which erupted into civil war. Its origins had developed during the war against the Soviets.

The war had seen major changes in the balance of power between the ethnic groups. The uprisings had begun in non-Pashtun areas. In the course of the war

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<sup>53</sup> Roy, *op cit.*, 1986, p 181

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the non-Pashtun groups (Tajiks, or Persian speaking Sunnis, Uzbeks and Hazaras) had asserted themselves as important military and therefore political forces. The Pashtuns were far more divided in their loyalties to the royalist and Islamist parties<sup>54</sup>. After Massoud's capture of Kabul, Hekmatyar and Sayyaf, armed and financed by the Pakistanis and Saudis respectively and supported by foreign volunteers, began a siege of the city to get the Jamiat out of power. Pashtuns drew explicit parallels with their victory in 1929. In three years an estimated 50,000 people were killed, mostly by Hekmatyar's bombardments of the city. Hundreds died during inter-ethnic killing in which all the groups - Pashtuns, the Jamiat and the Hazaras - participated.

Pakistan had new reasons to be interested in a quick and decisive victory of its proteges. With the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991 the new central Asian republics had the opportunity to direct their lucrative oil and gas exports to the south, by-passing Russia. The U.S. had put a veto on a pipeline being built through Iran, and an American company UNOCAL already had a plan to build a pipeline through Afghan and Pakistani territory. Furthermore Pakistan wanted to open up trade routes with the republics that would not be disrupted by warlords seeking to tax the "transport mafias"<sup>55</sup> and their cargoes, legal and illegal. Both of these objectives required peace and stability in Afghanistan, not civil war.

So Hekmatyar's inability to capture Kabul made Pakistan, his major supporter, lose confidence in him. Instead they were attracted by the emergence of a new militant Islamic movement led by the former mujahedin who were Durrani Pashtuns and who hated both Hekmatyar and Rabbani. Their support came from among the Pashtun students in the madrasas (religious schools) on the Pakistan/Afghanistan border. This was the Taliban. Pakistan now organised massive aid to the Taliban: Money, arms and logistics, recruitment of former mujahedin leaders and ex-Khalqi officers, and training and planning of operations.<sup>56</sup> In a period of two years the well-armed and well financed Taliban swept through Afghanistan. Benefiting from popular discontent with the

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54 Barry, op cit., 1973, pp 386-7.

55 Rashid, Taliban, op cit., 2000, p190.

56 Anthony Davis, "How the Taliban Became a Military Force, in Maley (ed), op cit., pp 68-69.

despotism of the warlords, they defeated some commanders and bought off others. In September 1996 they captured Kabul.

This victory was a "revenge of the Pashtuns"<sup>57</sup> against their non-Pashtun rivals and a victory for Pakistan. It was not total, since Massoud and the alliance of non-Pashtun forces managed to hold out in the north. The US initially greeted the Taliban positively, both for their anti-Iranian stand and because they would bring the stability needed for the construction of UNICOL's pipeline.<sup>58</sup> They could see "nothing objectionable" about the Taliban's version of Islam. Only after discovering that the Taliban's economy was based on the drugs trade and that they were hiding Bin Laden did US Secretary Madeleine Albright discover their "despicable" treatment of women.<sup>59</sup>

#### **TRADITIONALISTS OR ISLAMISTS?**

In the 1980s the Russian army occupied the towns and fighting predominantly took place in the countryside. It was overwhelmingly peasants who lost their lives. The victory of the mujahedin partly represented the victory of rural society over the cities. However the victory of the Taliban and its well publicised policies of the forced veiling of women, confining them to the home and preventing girls going to school, the amputation of the limbs of thieves, banning of music and the flying of kites, did not simply represent the victory of a traditional peasant Islam over the city

The Taliban themselves broke with traditionalism. Most obviously they were totally hostile to the monarchy and to the old aristocracy, whereas traditionalism supported the monarchy at the same time as it wanted a minimalist state. Traditional Afghanistan always had a certain tolerance towards ethnic and religious minorities, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Wahhabis had always been unpopular precisely for their intolerance. The Taliban were highly hostile both to Shias and to Sufi mysticism. As Pashtun chauvinists they sometimes tried to stop people speaking Persian. Even though the Hazaras had always been looked

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57 Oliver Roy in Maley, op cit., 1998, p 208

58 Rashid, op cit., 2000, p 64

59 Richard Mackenzie, "The United states and the Taliban" in Maley (ed), op cit., 1998, p 90.

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down upon, the type of ethnic cleansing seen in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1989 was unprecedented in recent Afghan history. Equally, forcing women to wear the all-covering burqa is not an Afghan tradition, even in rural areas.<sup>60</sup> In traditional society patriarchy is rooted in the family, and the public beating of women for being immodestly dressed by Taliban teenagers would occasion violent retribution from their male relatives.

The Islam of the Taliban was a product not of traditional society but of the refugee camps in Pakistan. There they studied at madrasas where they picked up a fusion of Pakistani Deobandi Islam and Saudi Wahhabism, a strict austere variant of Islam focusing on returning to the sacred texts and building a pure Islamic state. In Afghanistan this Islam became a force for division rather than unity. On these points there is a convergence between the fundamentalism of the Taliban and that of Bin Laden.

### **THE FRAGMENTATION OF ISLAMISM**

If the defeat of the Russians in 1989 was Islamism's greatest victory, it has had few victories since. Islamic unity was wrecked on the 2nd of August 1990 when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.<sup>61</sup> This, along with the American military response, polarised opinion throughout the Middle East and the Islamic world. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia not only supported the Americans but allowed American troops to use its territory for their attacks on Iraq. On the other hand, the Afghan veterans became violently anti-western and hostile to the Arab regimes. But they maintained a social and ideological conservatism that focused on individual morality, maintaining the purity of Islam and applying the Sharia rather than developing a radical social or economic agenda. In the 1990s they intervened in Bosnia, Algeria and Egypt and elsewhere, but without laying down roots. Their spectacular actions of violence increasingly isolated them from the rest of a generation, which was renouncing violence in favour of reformist gradualism and community participation,<sup>62</sup> whose political effects remain to be seen.

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60 Nancy Hatch Dupree, "Women Under the Taliban", in Maley (ed), op cit., 1998, p 160.

61 Kepel, op cit., 2002, p 10.

62 Salwa Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism*, I. B. Tauris, 2002.

The only place the mostly middle class cosmopolitan supporters of Bin Laden could find sanctuary was among the children of poor peasants brought up in the Afghan refugee camps. Encouraged by Pakistan, they returned to Afghanistan in May 1996 and fought for the Pakistanis in Kashmir and for the Taliban against the Northern Alliance. In Afghanistan they controlled intelligence and the religious police (the Ministry of the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice). Whether by guile or by bribery it is not clear, they became increasingly influential among the Taliban leadership in the areas of defence and foreign policy. They were far from universally popular even among the Taliban. In the months leading up to Sept 11th the Taliban were divided between a "nationalist" faction whose main concern was re-building the country and another apparently non-nationalist faction, including the leadership, which increasingly subscribed to Bin Laden's internationalist perspectives.

#### **AFTER THE TALIBAN**

The collapse of the Taliban was a result of overwhelming American military superiority, the erosion of their popular support, and the sudden enforced withdrawal of Pakistani military assistance on which their power was based.

The future of Afghanistan depends in large part on the evolution of U.S. military and political policy in central Asia and the Middle East, where the country may resume its marginal position. However it is clear that after two decades of war and now a massive American bombardment, there will be two sources of wealth and power in post-Taliban Afghanistan: western aid and drugs.

The post-Taliban state in Afghanistan will be neither necessarily democratic nor socially progressive. Thus the loya jirga which was assembled, following Afghan tradition, to form a new government in June, was dominated by pro-western members of the old aristocracy, with Karzai its President and the king its symbolic head. It also included a large number of warlords from across the country, particularly members of the Northern Alliance.

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Under the influence of some western non-governmental aid agencies a little western aid may trickle down to some of the overwhelming majority of the population who live in the rural areas. But the concentration of western aid agencies and workers in Kabul is more likely to lead to an intensified polarisation between the capital and the poverty stricken countryside, with the newly returned members of the old aristocracy in power reviving their traditional patterns of corruption to line their own pockets and those of a small westernised urban elite, with other city dwellers getting low paid service jobs.<sup>63</sup> Rural hostility to such a government would be inevitable.

The drugs economy also resists the centralisation of state power, even if the state and politicians benefit from its profits and even though some the warlords attempt to simultaneously benefit from foreign aid and from participation in the drugs trade. The drugs economy demands the reproduction of the traditionally fragmented system of power in which armed drugs smugglers become warlords of a new type who now "act locally but think globally"<sup>64</sup> within the cross-border networks of the drugs economy. This now include not only Iran and Pakistan but also the central Asian Republics. Resistance to any American attempt to launch a "war on drugs" in Afghanistan on the South American model would become rapidly politicised.

Even within a region under a newly emerging U.S. military and political hegemony, a western financed and supported Afghan ruling class is unlikely to see its power unchallenged from domestic or even from regional forces for long.

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63 Cf Marc W. Herold "Karzai & Associates Trickle Down Reconstruction"  
<http://cursor.org/stories/karzai.htm>

64 Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*, Zed Books, 2001, p 175. Jonathan Goodhand, "From Holy War to Opium War? A Case Study of the Opium Economy in North Eastern Afghanistan", in *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 19, No 2, 2000, p 278.