

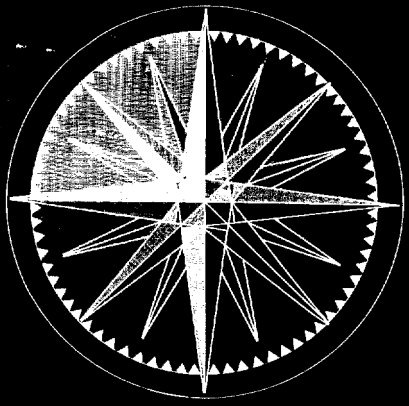
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SPECIAL REPORT

AFGHANISTAN UNDER KING ZAHIR SHAH

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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AFGHANISTAN UNDER KING ZAHIR SHAH

King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan arrives in the United States for a state visit on 4 September. He comes at a time when his country is moving toward a new constitutional experiment, and when its government, nominally under Prime Minister Yusuf but dominated by the King, still is somewhat insecure. Zahir is keeping himself well informed of the political activities of his cousin, former prime minister Daud, who resigned in March and who is the chief threat to the King's plans for a more liberal regime. However, limited measures of liberalization have been received favorably by most, although not all Afghans, and Zahir has felt it safe to visit West Germany in early August as well as to make his trip to the US.

The 49-year-old monarch is well disposed toward the West, and he has been looking forward to his first visit to the United States. He recently told an American visitor that Afghanistan and the US are "close spiritual cousins." The extension of the US invitation to him last February reportedly contributed to the new-found self-reliance and determination that culminated shortly thereafter in his taking the leadership of the government into his own hands.

The King's New Position

The King took power from Daud in reaction to Daud's dead-end policy toward Pakistan. Daud's efforts to pressure Pakistan over border and tribal issues (Pushtoonistan) had succeeded in provoking Karachi to the point where the Afghans had to abandon transit rights to the sea through Pakistan. This greatly increased Afghanistan's economic dependence on its northern neighbor, the USSR.



King ZAHIR

It was widely believed by Afghans at the time that there was no alternative leader capable of filling Daud's shoes. Zahir has always been somewhat retiring personally. He had seemed content to let his uncles and cousins wield power after he ascended the throne following his father's assassination in 1933. However, he sometimes appeared to have some behind-the-scenes influence, and through the years he gave a sympathetic hearing to

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Prime Minister YUSUF complaining tribesmen even though he might not actually secure redress for their grievances. His acceptance of Daud's resignation thus came as a surprise--probably to Daud as well --and Afghan political elements are still assessing Zahir's power and determination.

Zahir is aware that he is not yet firmly in control and is trying by various measures to improve his position. He hopes that his programs for political liberalization and for economic development will give him increased popular support. Behind the scenes, he is working hard to establish control over the army, the chief focus of power in Afghanistan.

The traditional solidarity of the present royal family, of which Daud is a member, works in favor of the King. Members of the family seem to want to keep their differences within the family unless the issue appears to be of fundamental importance. However, Zahir clearly realizes that his government must build a more solid record of achievement before its position will be appreciably strengthened.



King Zahir with then Prime Minister Daud.

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SECRETBasic Problems and Policies

The King's new government has not made drastic changes in domestic policy, but it has brought new methods and a different emphasis. The royal family is agreed that if it is to maintain itself in power, it must bring a measure of orderly progress to Afghanistan. Daud gave top priority to economic development but also pushed ahead in the more explosive field of social reform. The Zahir-Yusuf government is continuing these basic policies, but it is putting first priority on encouraging the evolution of Westernized political institutions. Along with this has come new encouragement to private economic enterprise in place of the statist emphasis of the previous regime.

Practically all Afghan leaders also believe that under present circumstances their country's independence is best maintained by a neutral course in international affairs. This course was endangered by Daud's obsession with the Pushtoonistan question. The removal of Daud and the King's more moderate approach made it possible for Pakistani President Ayub to offer substantial concessions, and agreement was reached last May to reopen the border. This in turn reopened the main door to the West. The easing of the Pushtoonistan campaign has also been welcomed by Afghanistan's non-Pushtoon minorities--Tajiks, Uzbeks, Mongoloid Hazaras, and others--who together comprise a majority of the population.

While the King prefers to rule with a lighter hand than did Daud, he faces the same problem of maintaining balance in Afghan politics. He must avoid alienating major sections of society by going too fast--or too slow--as he presses political and social changes.

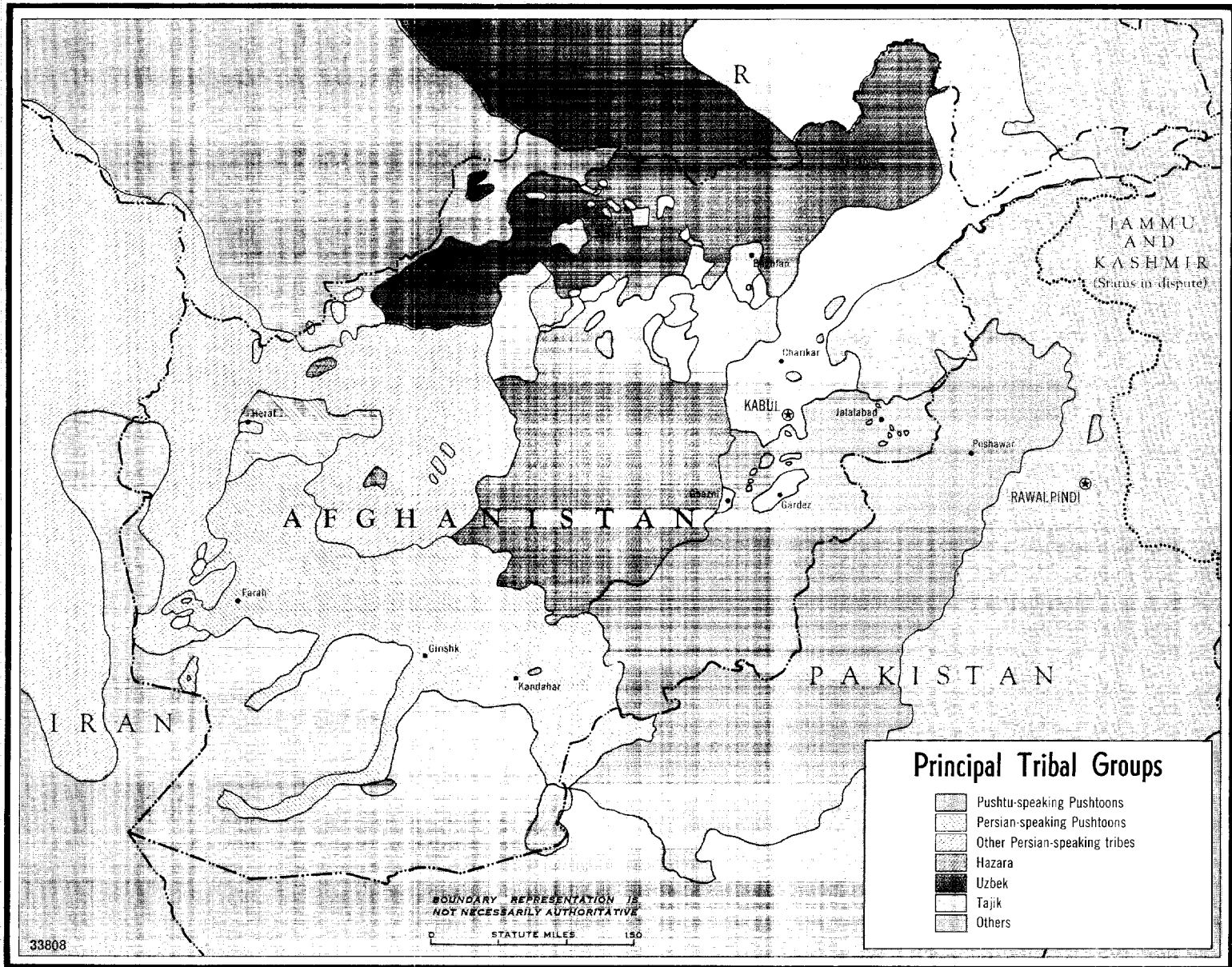
New Liberalization

The major change that the Zahir-Yusuf government has introduced during its first six months in power is a relaxation of Afghanistan's police state atmosphere. A number of political prisoners whose police records did not reveal the reason for their arrest have been released. This step was acclaimed by the liberally inclined intelligentsia, who are increasingly important influences on working-level government and on urban popular attitudes.

The press has been encouraged to publish articles critical of the government, although Afghan journalists remain careful not to overstep the bounds of discretion, and Kabul University has been encouraged to hold a genuinely free election to select a new faculty head. The latter development seems to have overshadowed several recent municipal elections, which apparently were still rigged as before.

Within the government itself, the National Assembly, long relegated to a rubber-stamp role, for the first time has held hearings on various parts of the budget, instead of merely

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accepting it as a whole. Several bills have been amended by the cabinet along lines suggested by the assembly.

In the bureaucracy, a spirit of initiative has bloomed in certain ministries and departments, and a new cooperation between ministries reflects a freedom among government officials that had not previously existed. The effects of the new look in the bureaucracy has been severely limited, however, by the shortage of competent Afghans to replace any but the most venal of the old guard.

Zahir and Yusuf have promised Afghanistan a new written constitution. A committee is to report its recommendations sometime this fall to the National Assembly, which is to suggest any changes in the draft constitution. The King, who presumably will be heavily engaged in its development, reportedly hopes to put it in force in early 1964.

However, no one, probably not even the King, yet has a clear idea of how far liberalism should go. Except among a few ultraliberals, no revolution of rising expectations is yet in evidence in Afghanistan, and many educated Afghans maintain a guarded cynicism toward promises of constitutional democracy. Moreover, officials whose careers were tied to authoritarian rule, Moslem religious leaders, and other conservative elements fear the prospect of the changes that

may follow. Even so, most Afghans clearly favor the changes made so far.

Free World Relations

The most dramatic achievement of the young regime so far has been to get the border with Pakistan reopened. This benefited Afghan merchants and consumers and reduced Afghan dependence on Soviet good will.

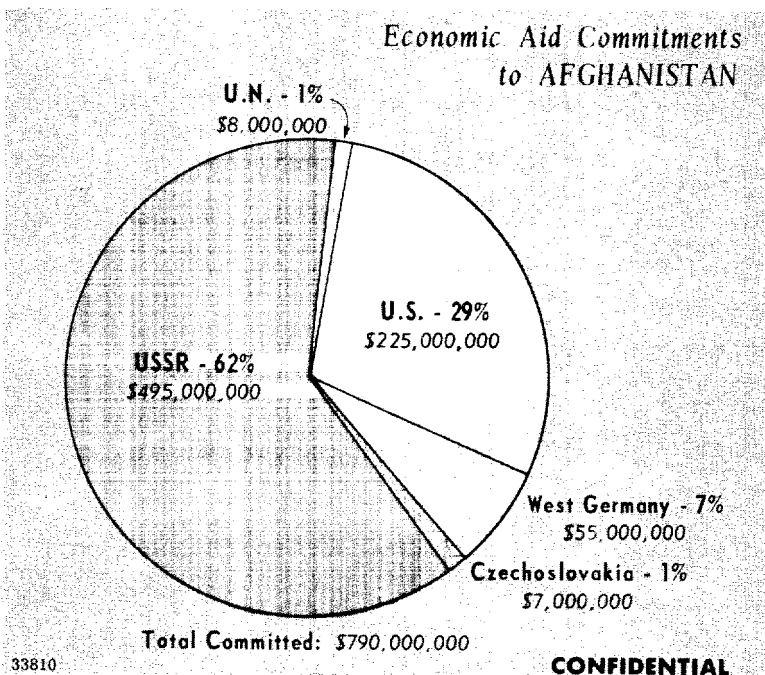
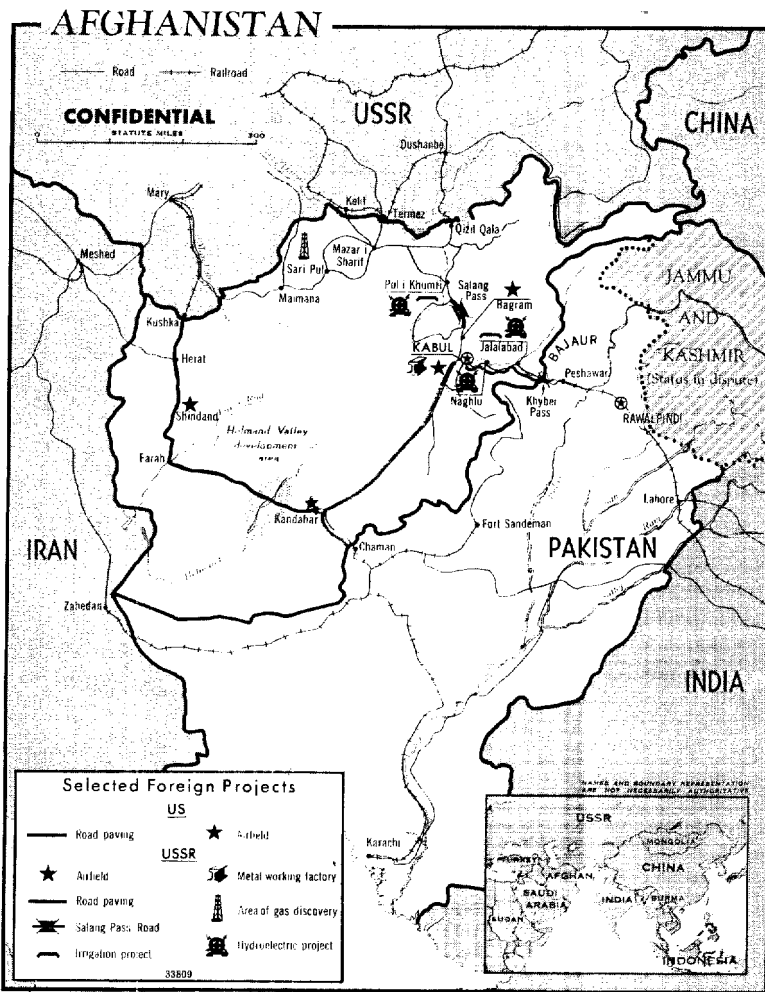
King Zahir cannot afford politically to abandon the Push-toonistan campaign entirely, but he is not emotionally committed to it. He admits that "some mistakes have been made by both sides," and speaks of having "blunted the sword." Kabul's anti-Pakistan propaganda in fact has been partially muted since Zahir took over, and the King apparently does not intend to encourage armed agitation in Pakistani tribal territory.

Relations with other non-Communist countries, especially with the United States, have generally improved. Afghan officials seem to speak more freely and frankly with American representatives than they have in recent years. An Afghan parliamentary delegation reported back enthusiastically about a visit to the US last July.

Bloc Relations

At the same time the new government has been careful to reassure Moscow that it does not envision any fundamental change

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in Afghanistan's relations with the USSR. One gesture: the King has invited Soviet President Brezhnev to visit Kabul in October, shortly after he returns from the US. The new government presumably will continue to seek Soviet economic assistance and to avoid calling into question basic Afghan-Soviet relations, such as have developed through the Soviet military assistance program.

The USSR has committed nearly \$500 million worth of economic assistance to Afghanistan, and the Afghans are utilizing this aid at the rate of 40 to 50 million dollars per year. The Afghan economy now is receiving as much foreign aid --from both bloc and free world sources--as it can absorb. The scope of Soviet aid programs consequently has not been expanded during the last two years, although press releases have been designed to make follow-up agreements sound like increased aid. This propaganda, however, has had the political effect of affirming Soviet support for the new government.

Many critics of the Daud regime had become concerned over the growth of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, where there are now over 2,000 Soviet technicians. However, the main immediate result of Soviet economic assistance has been to help the Afghan royal family to strengthen its image as a benefactor of the people.

The chief danger at present from the Soviet aid program is in the possible growth of pro-Soviet orientation among the several hundred Afghan army and air force officers being trained in the USSR. Soviet intelligence also must be presumed to have subverted at least a few of these trainees.

Zahir is reported concerned about the long-run dangers of possible Soviet inroads in the officer corps. Nevertheless, he has reportedly approved sending some 200 additional officers to the USSR for training.

The most the King's regime is likely to do in reducing its military dependence on the USSR is to look for alternative sources of supply for limited amounts of equipment and training. Tentative inquiries have been directed at the Swedes about equipment. During his visit to the US, the King may show interest in increased military training opportunities for Afghan officers in the United States.

King Zahir has made it clear that he does not plan further expansion of his army, which in recent years has been enlarged from 54,000 to about 90,000 men. Since Afghan appetites for more advanced weapons have already been whetted by previous deliveries of armor, jets, and radar, the King's conservative plans could become a point of friction with the army and air force. Soviet instructors

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