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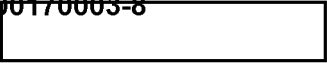
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# Afghanistan: Factions in the Ruling Party

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**Afghanistan: Factions  
in the Ruling Party**

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**Summary**

The ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) of Afghanistan, in which Moscow has a substantial stake, is beset by longstanding divisions. President Babrak Karmal's regime would have fallen apart by now were it not for constant Soviet pressure on the feuding factions—Babrak's Parcham (Banner) and the Khalq (People's) of former Presidents Amin and Taraki—to work together.

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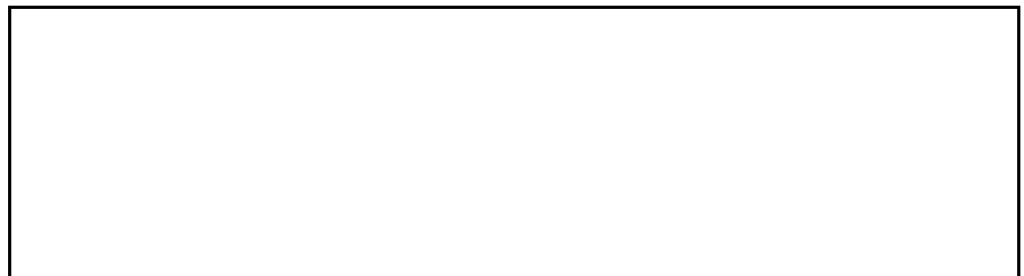
Still, personal enmity and the settling of old scores between the more numerous Khalqis and their Parchamist adversaries continue in spite of Soviet attempts at mediation. Moreover, as the intraparty struggle erodes the authority and saps the energies of the PDP's leaders, the Soviets will become even more involved in the regime's day-to-day decisionmaking process.

The strains in the regime are the same as those that weakened the governments of Amin and Taraki before the Soviet intervention. Soviet military intervention and political interference, far from bringing the two party factions together, have sharpened the antagonisms dividing them. Moscow could engineer yet another coup, but the Soviets are unlikely to come up with a new leadership that will achieve Moscow's objective of restoring stability under a Soviet-dominated regime.

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As they try to deal with the infighting, the Soviets are concerned that Babrak's faction in the military is weaker than its Khalqi rival. If the Soviets are ever to disengage from Afghanistan, they must first rebuild the demoralized Army and ensure its loyalty to the regime. Babrak's weak position in the military is a serious vulnerability Moscow must confront and probably will be an important factor in any Soviet consideration of an alternative leadership.


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Babrak recognizes that he remains in power only as long as Moscow believes he can serve Soviet interests. As he and the Khalqis vie for Soviet backing, Moscow will face difficult choices in estimating the prospects for each faction in holding the regime together and, over the longer term, governing effectively in the absence of Soviet occupation forces. For the foreseeable future, however, Moscow will not be able to look to its clients in Kabul to shoulder the burden of protecting Soviet interests in Afghanistan. 

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**Afghanistan: Factions  
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**Origins of the Split**

The government that came to power following the military coup on 27 April 1978, although purportedly representing the Communist People's Democratic Party formed in 1965, was actually an uneasy coalition of leftist groups including—most importantly—the two main factions of the PDP, the Khalq, and the Parcham. These two factions were divided for most of the period after 1967 when a group including Babrak Karmal broke away from Nur Mohammad Taraki's Khalq and formed the Parcham.

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Parcham was generally considered more pro-Soviet than Khalq, but factional differences were largely over personalities and tactics. Despite the Khalqis' more moderate reputation, there were no significant ideological differences between the two groups. Regarding tactics, the Parchamists advocated participation in the political process, and in 1965 and 1969 Babrak was elected to parliament. Taraki's Khalqis favored a slower, more methodical approach to power, recruiting cadres among the military, civil servants, teachers, and workers. At the urging of the Soviets, the two wings reunited in July 1977 to oppose President Daoud. But they did not expect they would be propelled into power within a year.

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**Falling Out of  
the Coup Makers**

Almost immediately after the Marxists seized power in April 1978, factional infighting and jockeying for power resumed, stirred by old, personal antagonisms and mutual distrust. Most of the military officers who had overthrown President Daoud were Khalqis and sided with Taraki in the factional disputes. A few others, led by Defense Minister Abdul Qader, were not formally aligned with either faction. Although leftist, they were more nationalist and suspicious of Moscow than the Khalqi and Parchamist participants in the coup against Daoud.

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On the surface, the Khalqis and the Parchamists seemed to be fairly evenly balanced, while the position of Qader's third group was considerably weaker. President Taraki headed the government and the party. In the Cabinet, Khalqis had two of three deputy prime ministers, and the Parchamists, one, but of the three most important ministries, Taraki's faction held the weakest, the Foreign Ministry, while the more important Defense and Interior Ministries were held respectively by Qader and Babrak's chief supporter, Nur Ahmad Nur.

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Although a confrontation among the three groups may have been inevitable, Taraki and his chief lieutenant, Amin, moved against Babrak long before any serious tensions developed. In late June and early July Taraki—apparently with Qader's full support—exiled most of the Parchamist leaders to ambassadorial posts abroad. The Soviets, undoubtedly concerned about the resumption of the power struggle within the party, nonetheless acquiesced in Taraki's move against Babrak. Babrak's followers do not appear to have been plotting against Taraki—despite later allegations by the government. There was, however, growing unhappiness among the military officers led by Qader at an influx of 300 to 400 Soviet advisers, which they may have attributed to Babrak's influence. [ ]

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A month later Taraki moved against the Qader group of leftist officers. On 17 August the government announced the arrest of Qader and several others for plotting against the revolution. Taraki and Amin linked Parcham to the Qader plot and tried unsuccessfully to recall the Parchamist ambassadors to stand trial. Babrak, who had been posted as Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, remained outside Afghanistan—primarily in Prague—until his installation as President in December 1979. [ ]

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Chief of Staff General Shahpur and a few others named by the government did plot against Taraki, but there is little to suggest that Qader was involved. A nationalist, and more an opportunist than a leftist, he was clearly a threat to Taraki, however, and had reportedly objected on a number of occasions to the growing Soviet influence in the country. Taraki presumably moved against him as soon as he felt strong enough, using his connection to the coup plot as an excuse. [ ]

A key element in Taraki's success was his control of the military. His faction of the party—largely through Foreign Minister Amin's efforts—had in the years before the coup recruited many junior officers who moved into positions of authority when the leftists came to power. Babrak's Parchamists were not as successful as the Khalqis in recruiting supporters in the military, and there was no reaction in the military to Babrak's exile. Qader's position, moreover, was not as strong as it appeared. Many leftist officers' loyalty was through the party to Amin and Taraki, not through the chain of command to Qader, whose removal, like Babrak's, triggered no response in the military. [ ]

#### Feuding After Intervention

The regime installed by the Soviets on 27 December 1979 is an unstable alliance of former rivals patched together by Moscow in the hope that supporters of both factions in the military and bureaucracy will work for the regime. The Soviets must have had reservations about backing a coalition so

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### Factional Alignment of the Regime's Key Figures

#### Parchamists

Babrak Karmal	Prime Minister, Secretary General of the People's Democratic Party, President of the Revolutionary Council	Leading figure among Parchamists. Exiled by Taraki in July 1978.
Nur Ahmad Nur	Member of the PDP Central Committee Secretariat, Member of the Central Committee and Politburo, Member of the Presidium of the Revolutionary Council	Second most important Parchamist. Served as Interior Minister under Taraki before being exiled.
Ghulam Dastagir Panjshiri	Member of the Central Committee and Politburo, Member of the Revolutionary Council	Survived purge of the Parchamists by Taraki. Demoted from Minister of Education to Minister of Public Works.
Soltan Ali Keshmand	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Planning, Vice President of the Revolutionary Council, Member of the PDP Central Committee and Politburo	Served as Minister of Planning under Taraki until his arrest in August 1978.
Anahita Ratebzad	Member of the Central Committee and Politburo, Minister of Education, Member of the Revolutionary Council	Minister of Social Affairs under Taraki until she was exiled as Ambassador to Yugoslavia.
Mohammad Rafi	Minister of National Defense, Member of the Central Committee, Member of the Revolutionary Council	Participated in armored attack against Daoud's forces. Appointed Minister of Public Works, he was arrested by the Khalqis in August 1978.

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#### Khalqis

Saleh Mohammad Ziray	Member of the Central Committee Secretariat, Member of the Politburo, Member of the Revolutionary Council	Has retained his post on Politburo since April 1978 coup.
Assadullah Sarwari	Deputy Prime Minister, Vice President of the Revolutionary Council, Member of the Central Committee and Politburo	Headed the Afghan Intelligence and Security Command under Taraki. Sarwari, Watanjar, Mazduryar, and Gulabzoi went into hiding in September 1979, when Amin seized power.
Mohammad Aslam Watanjar	Member of the Presidium of the Revolutionary Council, Minister of Communications	Participated in coups of 1973 and 1978. Served for a time as Minister of Defense under Taraki.
Sherjan Mazduryar	Member of the Central Committee, Member of the Revolutionary Council, Minister of Transport	A close friend of Watanjar. Under Taraki, served as Kabul Garrison Commander and Minister of Interior.
Sayed Mohammed Gulabzoi	Member of the Central Committee, Member of the Revolutionary Council, Minister of Interior	Minister of Communications under Taraki. Organized Air Force officers in support of Taraki prior to 1978 coup.

#### Military

Abdul Qader	Member of the Presidium of the Revolutionary Council, Member of the Central Committee	Taraki's Defense Minister until he was arrested in August 1978.
Gul Aqa	Member of the Presidium of the Revolutionary Council, Member of the Central Committee, Director of Political Affairs, Ministry of Defense	A shadowy figure, Gul Aqa is entrusted with the sensitive post of the military's political commissar.

This table is Secret.



deeply divided. They probably had difficulty persuading Babrak to give important party and government posts to his rivals. In view of the scarcity of leftist talent, however, the Soviets and Babrak may have concluded that they had to work with available party members, even the contentious ones. Several key figures have old scores to settle:



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The Soviets have had little success in getting the two rival factions to work together. A fundamental difference in the two factions' bases of support helps explain the enmity between the two groups. Since the party's formation in the 1960s, Babrak Karmal and the Parchamists have attracted the educated sons and daughters of wealthy urban families, whereas Taraki, Amin, and the Khalqis have recruited bright, poor, young people of city or village origins. In addition, the Soviet intervention has complicated the problem by sowing dissension among the party rank and file, many of whom believe the Soviets' expanding control of internal security, particularly in the cities, has turned most of the population against the regime.

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The factions show no inclination to reconcile their differences, and developments since the intervention indicate infighting is growing more intense:

- Fighting is reported to have broken out at a meeting of party leaders following Babrak's unsuccessful effort to remove Deputy Prime Minister Sarwari from office. One or more ministers are reported to have been wounded in the fracas.

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- Babrak, recalling his own exile by the Khalqis in 1978, is said to have made an abortive effort to remove Watanjar and other leading Khalqis by assigning them to ambassadorial posts abroad. 25X1

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- Members of the two factions carry out nightly killings of each other's officials.
  - Parchamist senior government officials fire their Khalqi subordinates at every opportunity. Parchamist-Khalqi rivalry in ministries and departments is interfering with work.
  - The two-month-long debate among party leaders over the selection of a new national flag ended when the one favored by the Parchamists was approved after heated argument at a meeting of the Revolutionary Council.  25X1

The Soviets must be particularly concerned that the factional rift in the military is eroding the already diminished effectiveness of the Army, a force that has been reduced to less than half its strength of 100,000 when the insurgency broke out in 1978. Factional violence has flared up, and a number of Afghan officers are reported to have been killed. One such incident, brought under control by the Soviets, resulted in the death of a Soviet adviser. The Soviet occupation has deepened the rift in the ruling party, posing a dilemma that the Soviets cannot resolve short of withdrawing their forces. Many Khalqi officers ridicule Babrak for having "ridden into power on a Soviet tank." They resent the presence of Soviet combat units, even though they recognize that the Afghan Army's counterinsurgency effort would collapse immediately if the Soviets withdrew.  25X1

As the factional dispute among Afghan officers accelerates the disintegration of the Army, the Soviets will be forced to shoulder more of the burden of fighting the insurgents. Feuding between Parchamist and Khalqi officers, who hold most of the key command and staff positions, is undermining Moscow's long-term objective of "Afghanizing" the war, if this was ever possible.

Perhaps the most important reason for the Soviets' resistance to Parchamist efforts to purge the Khalq from the ruling party is that the Khalqi faction is stronger than the Parchamist in the military, owing to Amin's recruitment of junior officers before the Marxists came to power. In a showdown, assuming the Soviets do not intervene, Khalqi military officers would probably have an edge over their adversaries.  25X1

Babrak is trying to strengthen the Parchamists' hand by selectively promoting Parchamist officers. The celebration on 27 April of the second anniversary of the revolution was the occasion for the promotion to general of several of the regime's leading figures, none of whom are Khalqis. At the same time, a number of Khalqis were retired or put on the reserve list. The Parchamists are also trying to bolster their position by reinstating officers jailed during Amin's Khalqi rule and enlisting their support in the power struggle against the Khalqis. The Soviets appear to have acquiesced in Babrak's attempts to shift the balance of power in the military even though these moves seem certain to stimulate more infighting. [REDACTED]

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### Prospects

Moscow can maintain whatever government it wants in Kabul as long as it is prepared to accept the political and economic costs of doing so. It would be difficult for the Soviets to allow one faction to get the better of the other in the persistent struggle for power. The Parchamists appear to be more amenable to Soviet guidance, but the Khalqis greatly outnumber them. Total party membership is small—probably no more than 10,000—and the regime cannot afford to alienate the rank and file of either faction who are needed to ensure the loyalty of the bureaucracy and, more important, the military. Attrition of military and civilian party members through purges, assassinations, and battlefield casualties has already seriously weakened the party's hold on the instruments of power. [REDACTED]

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As the Soviets continue to impose an uneasy truce on the factions, they probably are considering the installation of new leaders who might have a better chance to establish an effective government. New leaders selected by Moscow, however, if not Communists, would have to be responsive to Moscow's guidance and serve Soviet interests in Afghanistan. If the Soviets conclude Babrak has outlived his usefulness, the Afghan Prime Minister would be pressed to step down for the "greater good of the revolution." If he resisted, the Soviets could easily engineer a coup using opportunists in the regime's leadership, all of whom recognize that Soviet backing would be essential in any move to oust Babrak. [REDACTED]

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Moscow could arrange to replace the Babrak government with little or no forewarning if it came to believe that new leadership would be more effective. In assessing the strength and effectiveness of possible alternatives to Babrak, the Soviets will be looking for someone who might command the loyalty and rebuild the morale of the military and make some headway in overcoming popular resistance to the revolution. None of Moscow's possible

candidates are capable of dealing with what seem to be the regime's insurmountable problems, but a few choices may be more attractive to the Soviets than others:

- Saleh Mohammad Ziray. One of seven members of the PDP's first Central Committee in 1965, Ziray, a 44-year-old Khalqi, has demonstrated a talent for survival. A holdover from Amin's Politburo, he has been a member of the party's leadership since it was founded. Ziray is bright—he graduated from Kabul University Medical School at the head of his class—and has the reputation of being an opportunist. His appointment to Babrak's Politburo and Revolutionary Council may have been at the insistence of the Soviets. He is a member of the politically dominant Pushtun ethnic group. 25X1



- Dastagir Panjshiri.  Panjshiri, 25X1  
47, is a survivor. Despite his alignment with the Parchamists, he was retained in the Cabinet and Politburo when Taraki and Amin exiled Babrak and most leading Parchamists. It is possible that he and other figures in the regime who have survived the revolution's numerous purges and power struggles have been retained because of Soviet intercession on their behalf. The Soviets would see his proven ability to get along with Khalqis as an asset in the effort to rebuild party unity. But Panjshiri's Tadjik ethnic origin would weigh against his selection for the top party and government posts.
- Abdul Qader. Although a left-leaning member of the PDP, Qader, 38, is probably more nationalist than Marxist, and according to some he is an opportunist with no firm ideological commitments. Promoted to lieutenant general on 27 April, he was one of few non-Parchamists on the promotion list. As Air Force Chief of Staff at the time of the April 1978 coup, Qader had enough influence with fighter pilots at Bagram Air Base to tilt the outcome in favor of the coup plotters. That he was not executed during his imprisonment by Taraki has given rise to speculation that the Soviets used their influence to save him. Qader might be attractive to the Soviets as a candidate for one of the top posts in a post-Babrak government because of his following among nonpolitical officers. Not being an ideologically

committed Communist, however, he would probably be a figurehead. If he is more opportunist than nationalist, he probably would accept figurehead status. Now tainted by his association with Marxism, Qader in January received a hostile reception in Herat when he tried to calm antigovernment protesters.

- Mohammad Khan Jalalar. The Soviets may view Minister of Trade Jalalar as a candidate for one of the regime's key posts. Because of his reputation as an apolitical figure, he might help overcome popular resistance to the revolution. His status as a minority Uzbek would probably preclude his selection as president or prime minister, but he might be named deputy prime minister. Jalalar, 44, has had extensive service in government, having served as Minister of Finance under the monarchy and Minister of Commerce under Daoud. Like Qader, however, he is too identified with the left to gain popular acceptance [redacted]

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[redacted] In 1930 his family fled to Afghanistan from the Soviet Union, where he still has some distant relatives. [redacted]

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In the end, the Soviets may decide to muddle through with Babrak. Unlike Amin, whom the Soviets deposed, Babrak is tractable and has no illusions about charting an independent course. He is reasonably articulate, although one performance before the media was poor. One of a few figures in the regime who was elected to parliament during the constitutional period, he probably has some appeal among the small number of Afghans who support the regime. [redacted]

The Soviets are unlikely to devise a formula that resolves the conflict between their objective of dominating Afghanistan and their interest in a government that is acceptable to the Afghan people and not reviled by them as an appendage of Moscow. The Soviets could replace Babrak and bring additional non-Communist figures into the government, but any regime sponsored by Moscow is unlikely to be more effective than the present one in halting the disintegration of the Army or attracting broader popular support. The Soviets will almost certainly not be able to install a popular Afghan Government unless they are willing to reduce their military presence significantly and give assurances that all of their troops will be withdrawn. [redacted]

As the Army continues to disintegrate and factional strife in the bureaucracy paralyzes the government, the Soviets will be forced to expand their role in pacifying the country and running the government. The Soviets will get no early relief from these problems. The factional split in the regime

is probably beyond repair, and under the best of conditions, it could take years to assemble an army capable of making headway against the insurgents without Soviet help. For the foreseeable future, Moscow will not be able to look to its clients in Kabul to shoulder the burden of protecting Soviet interests in Afghanistan. Moscow may be aware of the open-ended nature of its commitment. There is no sign that the Soviets are contemplating withdrawal, and the military and economic resources that they have poured into Afghanistan in support of the intervention suggest they are preparing for a long-term presence

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