

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
The Director

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

Executive Registry
80-013

3 January 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President
The Vice President
Secretary of State
Secretary of Defense
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs ✓

Attached is a CIA study entitled, "Tribalism Versus Communism in Afghanistan: The Cultural Roots of Instability." Although originally drafted in October, it has now been revised and published. I believe it provides an excellent background perspective to political events in Afghanistan today. (C)


STANSFIELD TURNER

Attachment:

- SI 80-10001
- Copy 141 - Brzezinski
- 140 - Defense
- 139 - State
- 138 - Vice President
- 137 - President

[Redacted box]

Distr

One w/Atch Each Addressee

- 1 - w/o Atch DCI
- 1 - W/Atch DDCI
- 1 - W/Atch ER File
- 1 - w/o Atch DD/NFA
- 1 - w/o Atch OSI
- 1 - w/o "NSE"

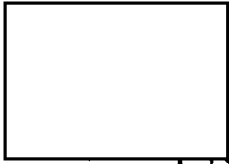
[Redacted box]

(WITHOUT ATTACHMENT, THIS MEMORANDUM IS CLASSIFIED CONFIDENTIAL)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

25X1

MEMORANDUM FOR:



affin to This pub in
on Afghan file.

Date 4 JAN 1980

FORM 5-75 101 USE PREVIOUS EDITIONS

'AFGHAN'



Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP81B00401R000600170005
National
Foreign
Assessment
Center

Secret

J/K
A
JFK

Tribalism Versus Communism in Afghanistan: The Cultural Roots of Instability

An Intelligence Assessment

Secret

SI 80-10001
January 1980

25X1

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP81B00401R000600170006-5

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP81B00401R000600170006-5



Foreign
Assessment
Center

Secret

Tribalism Versus Communism in Afghanistan: The Cultural Roots of Instability

An Intelligence Assessment

*Information as of 16 October 1979 has been used
in preparing the major part of this report.
Information concerning the recent coup is
reflected but does not change the basic judgments.*

The author of this paper is

Office of Scientific Intelligence. It has
been coordinated with the Offices of Political Analy-
sis, Geographic and Cartographic Research, and
Central Reference, the Directorate of Operations, and
the National Intelligence Officer for the Near East
and South Asia.

Secret

SI 80-10001
January 1980

**Tribalism Versus Communism
in Afghanistan:
The Cultural Roots of
Instability** []

Overview

The execution of Hafizullah Amin and the installation of the more pliable Babrak Karmal as President of Afghanistan, will not significantly alter the prospects for prolonged insurgency. Despite increase Soviet aid, the new regime will be a government under siege, continually attacked by fiercely independent, but poorly organized, Pashtun tribesmen. []

25X1

The Communist regime in Afghanistan and the Afghan tribesmen have been in conflict since the Communist seizure of power in 1978. Although the tribesmen are not unified, they will continue to keep the countryside in a state of instability. The regime, despite only a thin layer of public support, probably will maintain control of the major cities. Indeed, the Soviets and their puppet regime are likely to face the same long resistance that an earlier generation experienced when the Soviets required a decade to subdue the Muslim populations of Central Asia. []

25X1

For thousands of years, the topography and Afghan cultural mores militated against the formation of a strong central government and even against a strong union of the tribes themselves. The only characteristics common to the tribesmen are martial values, an egalitarian tradition, a theologically unsophisticated version of Islam, and a distrust for authority. []

25X1

Successful Afghan monarchs mustered popular support by drawing upon the people's fears of invasion by a foreign power with an alien religion and bent tradition to their side through the skillful exploitation of such traditional values as defense of personal and tribal honor, attachment to religion, and intense dislike of foreigners. []

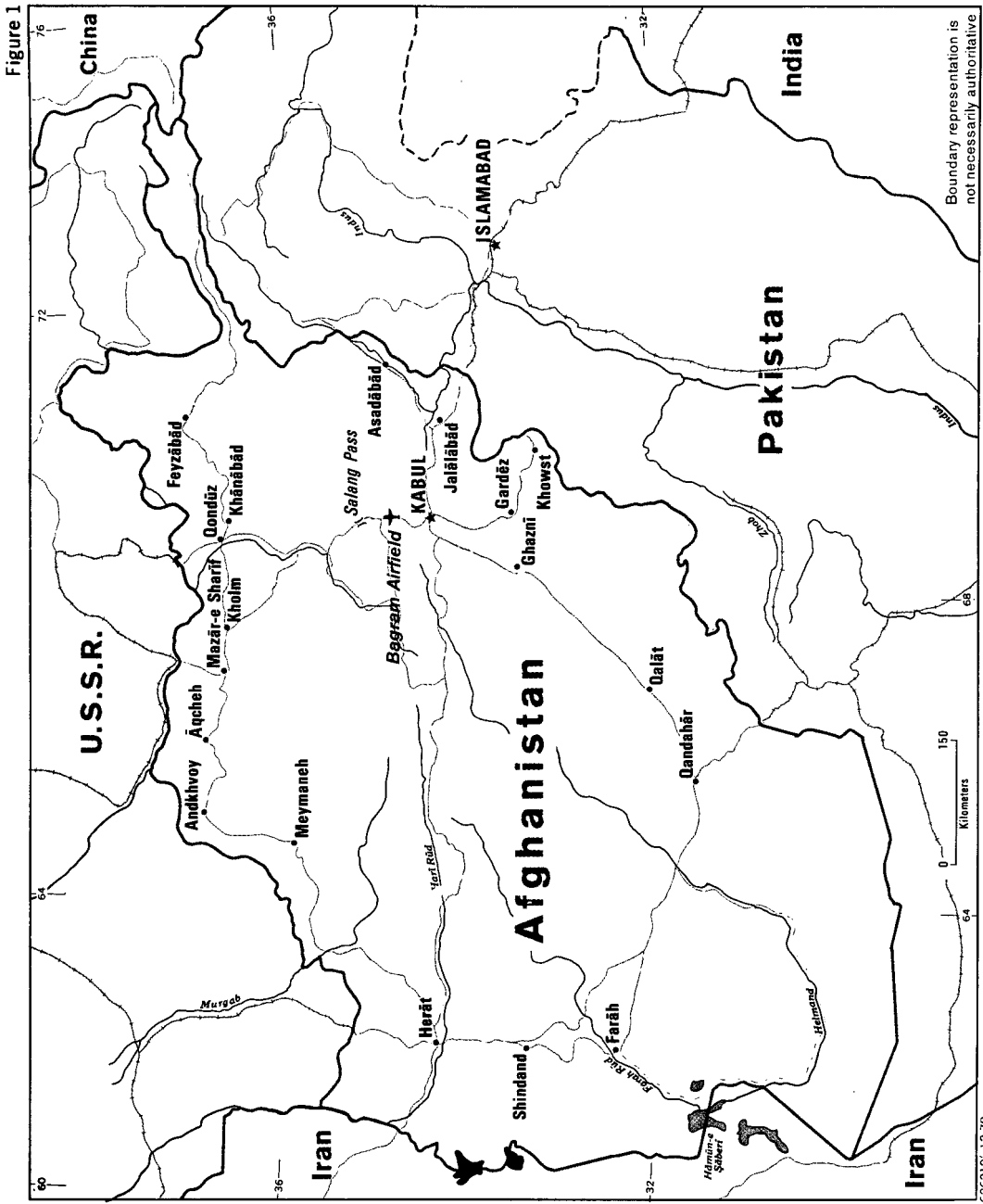
25X1

In contrast, the Communist revolutionaries have tried to overturn tradition rather than adapt it, to eliminate local autonomy, to destroy the elite class by confiscating its land, and to undermine the authority of the Muslim religious establishment. These actions have aroused the resistance of the fiercely independent Afghans. The present no-win situation—persistent insurgency and fragile Communist control of urban areas—is expected to continue. []

25X1

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Overview	iii
Introduction	1
Tribal Politics	1
Bribery and Patronage	3
Cooperation and Co-optation	3
Martial Tradition	3
Religion	4
Xenophobia	5
The Communist Attempt at Control	5
The New Modernizers	6
Afghan Communism	7
Goals and Program	8
Civil War—Communism Versus Tribalism	9
Maps	
Topography of Afghanistan	vi
Major Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan	2



Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative

636219 12-79

Tribalism Versus Communism in Afghanistan: The Cultural Roots of Instability

Introduction

Afghanistan is a small, extremely poor, landlocked country that never has been effectively modernized. Because it is divided by high mountain ranges, arid plains, and often unfordable rivers, communications and transportation networks have remained rudimentary.

For 200 years, succeeding monarchs have done little more than consolidate their own power for short periods of time; major attempts at reform and centralization have usually failed. The principal Afghan ethnic groups tend to live apart from each other under the hegemony of Pashtun tribesmen, who share martial values, an egalitarian tradition, and a distrust of authority. The ideological unity of the country is provided by a theologically unsophisticated version of Islam, permeated by tribal ways.

Afghanistan's 640,000 square kilometers are located in a mountainous-desert terrain surrounded by the Soviet Union, Iran, Pakistan, and China. The Hindu Kush mountain range divides the country in two, and subsidiary ranges bisect other localities. There is but one nationwide network of roads linking the principal cities with Kabul. The major north-south road was unusable in the winter until 1964, when Soviet engineers constructed a covered road along the 3,400-meter-high Salang Pass (figure 1). Four-fifths of the country is mountainous; the remainder slopes away to arid plains. Cultivation is limited mainly to irrigated valleys. Industrial development, telephone lines, medical facilities, and educational opportunities are minimal; there are no railroads.

Most of Afghanistan's estimated 15.5 million people—the first national census was taken as late as 1979—live a hard life near subsistence level. Ninety percent are small farmers, mountain herdsman, or both, with average annual per capita incomes so low and from such primitive sources that they have not been calculated. The mortality rate for the typical

Afghan during the first five years of life is 40 percent. Barely 10 percent of all Afghans are literate. Less than a million people live in the country's five major cities; some 2 million or approximately one-eighth of the population still are nomadic tribesmen.

25X1

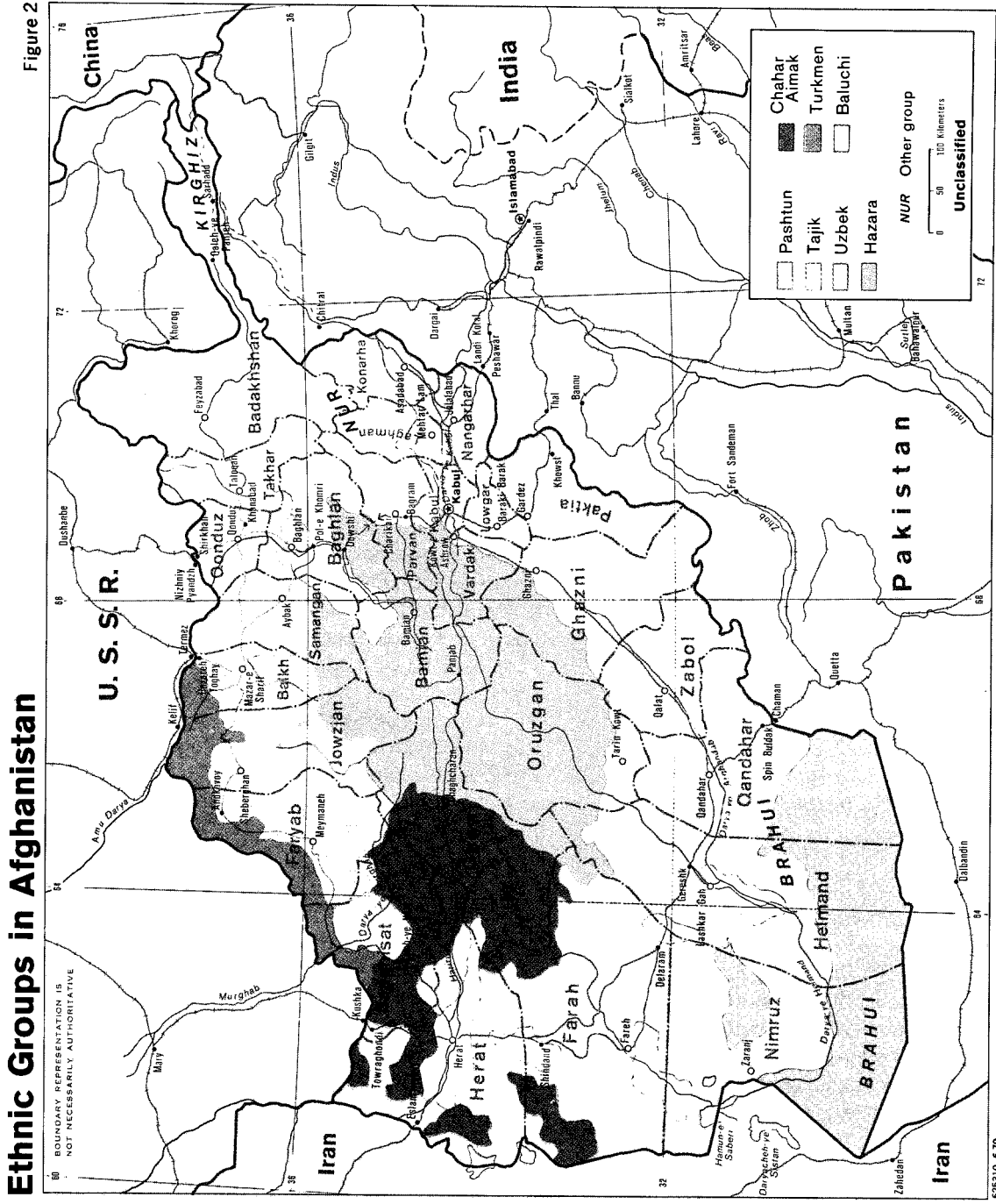
The topography of mountains and desert has tended to isolate Afghan ethnic groups from one another. Indeed, some groups have a closer affinity with kindred groups across the border than with their fellow nationals: Uzbeks, Turkmens, and Tajiks share a similar culture with like people across the Soviet border; Persian-speaking people or Farsiwan live alongside Iran; Pashtun and Baluchi tribes straddle the border with Pakistan. There are also Mongoloid Hazaras, Persian-speaking Qizilbash, Turkic-related Aimaq, along with other, smaller numbers of peoples scattered through the country. What unity Afghanistan possesses derives from the dominance of Pashtun tribesmen, who make up half the population; the use of the Persian-related language, Dari, as a *lingua franca*; a shared belief in Islam; and a historical distrust of foreigners (figure 2).

25X1

Tribal Politics

By virtue of their martial tradition and ability, Pashtuns have held sway in Afghanistan since Ahmad Shah Durrani established the first Afghan Empire in 1747. Ahmad Shah built his regime carefully, using the mechanisms by which each larger tribe ruled itself, indeed the same systems that guided relations within subtribes, clans, and family groupings. These same mechanisms, however, also promoted independent attitudes among men, egalitarian lifestyles, and a pervasive distrust of authority. Governments and Pashtun culture have coexisted uneasily ever since.

25X1



To set up his monarchy, Ahmad Shah had to mobilize support among his own tribe, the Durrani, and wage war against other strong tribes, such as the Ghilzai and Afridi. To maintain the loyalty of his fellow tribal chieftains, as well as the allegiance of those he conquered, he used a combination of bribery or subsidy and patronage. He consolidated his rule by relying on traditional decisionmaking processes of cooperation and co-optation, and by skillfully exploiting Pashtun martial values, the tribesmen's attachment to religion, and their dislike of foreigners. With varying degrees of success, Afghan rulers continued to use the same techniques until President Mohammad Daoud was overthrown in 1978. []

Bribery and Patronage

Ahmad Shah founded his reign with the captured treasury of the Persian Emperor Nadir Shah, in whose army he served. He used his acquired resources to buy the allegiance of tribal chiefs who had personal military followings. As rival tribes were conquered, Ahmad Shah included their chiefs in a widening circle of military collaborators who were personally loyal to him because he offered them important positions at court in order to keep an eye on them and to provide them with means to accumulate wealth in land and tax exemptions. For funds to support allied chieftains and personal armies, kings over the next century taxed burgeoning trader groups of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews at the cost of eventually destroying the commercial urban bases of the Afghan economy. []

This system of rule diminished the monarchy. Because each tribal chief retained his own local power base, a chief's loyalty was not automatically kept by an emperor or passed on to his successor, and the rate of succession was rapid. Of the 26 men who reigned in Afghanistan after Ahmad Shah, only four died of natural causes. The system persisted through the 1950s, when Daoud was able to create a centralized army with the help of Soviet aid. []

Cooperation and Co-optation

To secure the legitimacy of their dynasties, emperors traditionally have used the decisionmaking procedures of Pashtun society. Even today, at all levels from village to clan to tribe to tribal confederation, male representatives from the relevant group are obliged to participate in *jirgas* or councils. The *jirgas* are formed ad hoc as socially divisive issues arise; they sit until a consensus or "sense of the meeting" has been reached. Representatives are selected on the basis of talent and respect rather than age. Moreover, each man's honor, as well as that of the family or tribe for which he speaks, is committed to enforcing the *jirga's* decision. The style of the *jirga* is egalitarian: there is no presiding officer; everyone has a right to speak; and decisions must be unanimous. []

25X1

From Ahmad Shah on, succeeding Afghan kings have used the *loya jirga*, or meeting of tribal chieftains, to gain support for new policy directions. The strongest of the Afghan monarchs, Abdur Rahman, the "Iron Amir," convened a *loya jirga* when he set out to establish a centralized bureaucracy in the 1880s; the reforming Emperor Amanullah used another *loya jirga* in the 1920s to gain a modicum of approval for his modernizing policies; in the 1930s, Nadir Shah called one to gain approval for a new constitution. The term was used again in the 1960s to describe Afghanistan's short-lived attempt at a parliamentary body. In the traditional *jirga*, the emperor was only first among equals, and centralized authority was constrained by locally entrenched interests. []

25X1

Martial Tradition

At the heart of the Pashtun code of *Pakhtunwali*—consisting of revenge, hospitality, and the right to asylum—is the martial tradition. Every man must be strong enough to protect his interests—generally defined as gold, women, and land—and each man is raised to take pride in his fighting ability. Indeed, the martial arts are taken so seriously that Pashtun boys do not play war games, but from a very early age are trained by their male elders in military skills such as stalking and the use of arms. These skills are regarded as personal and not subject to uniform or externally

YRGHT



A Pashtun tribesman displays his treasured rifle.

The Pashtun martial tradition, therefore, has played an ambiguous role in Afghan history, directed as it is toward parochial loyalties. On the one hand, some kings have used successfully the popular propensity to war to get military support from tribal chieftains against external enemies, as well as to shore up their dynasties; this was especially true in the 19th century when the British were encroaching on Afghan territory. On the other hand, tribal armies have just as frequently turned against central authority when the latter appeared to overstep the limits of local autonomy. In 1924, the Mangal tribes of Khost Province rebelled against the imposition of taxes and social reform by King Amanullah. Rarely, however, have the tribes been able to coordinate their activities to bring down authority; 1929 was one of the few times it occurred, but the tribes' inability to unite after bringing down the King led to a period of national anarchy. [REDACTED]

25X1

Religion

Afghan Islam is a peculiar blend of orthodoxy and tribal mores. Although officially of the Hanafi school of the Sunni sect, Afghanistan has been isolated from the great centers of Islamic learning and has produced neither great schools nor profound religious philosophers. The majority of religious leaders are local mullahs, haphazardly trained, who approach their religion in a simple way. Entrenched in their localities as teachers, "learned" members of *jirgas*, and landowners through their control of mosque lands, they have accommodated the strictures of the *Sharia* (religious law) to coexist with the values Pashtun tribesmen place on their code and local independence. Consequently, Afghans are passionately attached to their religion. [REDACTED]

25X1

imposed discipline—most youth disdain military service, and the Army, in fact, is filled with soldiers from minority groups and draftees. To the Pashtun, the martial arts are to be exercised for personal, family, or tribal honor, pleasure, and/or gain. So ingrained are these attitudes that today each generation still looks forward to a major battle in order to demonstrate its self-worth and bands of men form a *lashkar* or war party. Historically, tribal armies often have taken arms against each other—sometimes siding with one or another of the dynastic contenders—and these persistent rebellions over time have prevented the emergence of a strong central authority. [REDACTED]

As with their martial views, the strong religious beliefs of the tribesmen have worked both for and against central authority. In some periods, mullahs have raised the cry of *jihad* (war against the infidel) to aid emperors in fighting external enemies; in other periods, they have roused the tribes against monarchs who seemed to have encroached upon the religious leaders' local influence. Perhaps Abdur Rahman was the most successful of all monarchs in coping with the Afghans'

religious feelings. The Iron Amir attracted the support of religious leaders and tribal armies in the 1890s by raising the cry of *jihad* , conquering Kafiristan, renaming it Nuristan or "Land of Light," and forcibly converting its inhabitants to Islam. At the same time, he undercut the autonomy of the mullahs by co-opting them into his regime; to control them, he employed them as teachers, minor administrators, and judges on full pay while cutting off their independent sources of income. Yet even the Iron Amir was careful not to interfere with the religiously sanctioned customs of everyday life. [redacted]

In contrast, his grandson Amanullah overstepped the limits of custom and incurred the wrath of the mullahs when he emancipated women, secularized some legal codes, and attempted to introduce Western education. As a result, when Nadir Shah captured the throne after Amanullah's overthrow in 1929, he felt compelled to introduce a constitution that reinstated the primacy of Islamic law, the authority of the mullahs, and the seclusion of women. Nadir's successors did not feel confident enough to initiate reforms again until nearly 30 years later. Female emancipation, for example, did not receive official sanction until 1959.

[redacted]

Xenophobia

Afghanistan's culture, geography, and history have fostered an intense dislike of foreign interference. Since ancient times, Afghanistan has been a stamping ground for conquerors on their way to other places. Afghans have seen their once-great cities and monuments destroyed. Even when Afghanistan withstood British invasions from India in the 19th century, emperors used the ever-present threat of encroachment by a power with an alien religion to gain support, heightening the sense of isolation and independence already present among Afghans. These feelings were further sharpened by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Soviet subjugation of the Muslim Khanates to the north in the 1920s. The demise of their Islamic way of life brought many Uzbek and Turkmen refugees to Afghanistan. The emigres contributed to Afghan distrust of the atheistic regime, and one of King

Amanullah's fatal errors that alienated his people was to use Soviet planes in putting down the Khost Rebellion. His successors were careful to keep their distance from foreign powers until Daoud as Prime Minister brought Kabul closer to the Soviet Union in the 1950s. [redacted]

25X1

In sum, although one subtribe—really one family—reigned in Afghanistan for over 100 years, the longevity of the Mohsiban dynasty depended upon the ability of succeeding monarchs to recognize the limits placed upon the exercise of power and bend tradition to their side. The king was no more than the chief tribal leader—and probably not significantly richer than the country's major landowners—using his resources in the way chieftains used theirs: to cement the loyalty of dependents with rewards, jobs, and tax exemptions; to exchange favors; and to avoid pushing too hard on the independence of subordinates. Underneath the facade of modern institutions that kings set up around themselves, a network of personal relations and connections kept the country governed in a minimal way. A king's writ or authority did not extend far beyond Kabul and some other urban centers. [redacted]

25X1

The Communist Attempt at Control

In 1978, Communist revolutionaries captured the government in Kabul and tried to change the course of Afghan history. Through a disciplined party and committed members of the military officer corps, the new leaders have tried to assert totalitarian control. They have attempted to alter the patterns of local tribal life by destroying the elite class through land confiscation, by undermining the authority of the Muslim religious establishment, and by eliminating local autonomy. The Communist leadership is relying upon the support of a comparatively small group of young people with modern educations who, discomfited by the backwardness of their country, believe that they can make a contribution to national development. In effect, the Communists and their youthful supporters were an unintended outgrowth of bureaucratic reforms initiated in the 1950s. [redacted]

25X1

YRGHT



Fiercely independent Afghan tribesmen keep the countryside in a state of instability.

The New Modernizers

Afghan rulers traditionally maintained small bureaucracies for the narrow purposes of keeping the peace and collecting taxes. This was altered somewhat in the early 1900s when King Amanullah started to modernize the country. Sensing the need to equip bureaucrats with modern skills, he began sending small groups of Afghans to study abroad, as well as setting up a European-like educational system in the country. For most of the 20th century, the educational network grew slowly, and there was sufficient expansion in government departments to employ the relatively few graduates being produced. Moreover, although the most important positions were virtually monopolized by relatives of the royal family or sons of the wealthy elite, the system offered a fair degree of mobility to children of lesser Pashtun families who, by virtue of their talent or personal connections, obtained a foothold in the modern educational establishment. Because their futures were assured and they could for most of their careers lead a comparatively comfortable life in Kabul—often with the opportunity for foreign study at the regime's expense, as well—members of the Afghan intelligentsia tended to remain apolitical. [redacted]

The equilibrium in the system shifted when Daoud, a cousin of King Mohammad Zahir, served as Prime Minister from 1953 to 1963 and as President from 1973 to 1978 after he had successfully overthrown Zahir. Daoud's inclinations were autocratic, and he sought to enhance the bureaucracy and officer corps in order to centralize Afghanistan effectively. More students were sent abroad, especially to the Soviet Union; the training of professional officers occurred almost entirely under Soviet auspices. The size of the student body within the country also grew, reducing employment opportunities proportionately. Daoud's policies made the Afghan intelligentsia aware of its own importance and politicized some of its members. More members of the tiny literate class came to resent—and, perhaps, to be ashamed of—Afghanistan's extreme backwardness. They also became antagonistic toward the continued dominance of the royal family, which they associated with the perpetuation of Afghanistan's backwardness and their own growing lack of opportunity and political freedom. Thus, slowly during the Daoud era, leftist viewpoints came to be taken more seriously. [redacted]

25X1

Afghan Communism

While many in the professional class probably remained indifferent, local Communist parties filled a political void during Afghanistan's short-lived experiment with parliamentary government. From 1964 to 1973, a Parliament with two houses was formed under the sponsorship of King Zahir. The King's choices for Prime Minister were ineffectual leaders, almost no legislation was enacted, and political parties were not allowed to exist legally, but elections were held throughout the country and the legislature provided a national platform of sorts. (Surveillance, as well as censorship of political publications, continued throughout the period.) [redacted]

The Communists took advantage of the electoral opportunity and were virtually the only group to present a coherent political viewpoint. In consequence, their speeches were well received by the expanding body of students in Kabul, who were just beginning to gain a sense of their own political strength; at this time, the first student strikes took place at Kabul University. Beyond the capital, Communists—often sent by the regime to the provinces as punishment for their activities in Kabul—found an equally receptive audience among secondary school students in the expanding provincial educational system. Younger members of the officer corps who had been trained in the USSR also found the Communist viewpoint congenial. The Communists never stopped propagandizing and recruiting among these groups—playing upon their fears, making promises about a better future, and appealing to their ideals in an atmosphere that continued to be mildly repressive. [redacted]

Although the Communists were the only political force organized in a modern sense, the leadership of the movement was characterized by factional divisiveness, with members lining up with one or another set of leaders to form two permanent factions. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was founded formally at a secret congress of Afghan Communists in 1963; by 1967 it already had split into two factions; the two groups merged again in an uneasy alliance in 1977. The Parcham (Banner) faction, headed by flamboyant orator Babrak Karmal (just installed by the Soviets as President), drew many of its more important members from the old landowning

elite among the major Pashtun tribes, who used their share of family wealth to help Parcham; a number of the Parcham leaders were related to one another. The Khalq (People) faction, led by author and literary figure Nur Mohammad Taraki, tended to attract its leaders from tribal groups of less stature and wealth. Both groups were allied with Moscow—although the Parcham took a more evolutionary approach toward revolution than the Khalq, in contrast to a smaller group of Communists who looked to Beijing for their model. The two factions supported Daoud in 1973 when he abolished the monarchy; because of his pro-Soviet leanings and plans for a more centralized bureaucracy, the Communists hoped they would have a greater role in his new regime. [redacted]

25X1

The Communists' expectations were only partially fulfilled, and their opportunities for participation in the Daoud government diminished over time. By April 1978 the Communists felt compelled to act. Mir Akbar Khaibar, a senior Parcham leader, was killed on 17 April, and the old PDPA—the two factions were tenuously united again—responded by vociferously lashing out at the regime. When Daoud cracked down and ordered the arrest of the PDPA leaders, the Communists in the officer corps and key Kabul regiments turned against Daoud and his allies; all were executed brutally. It quickly became apparent that the Khalq faction was dominant, and the top Parcham leaders, including Karmal, were soon exiled—to ambassadorships, at first—and the party purged of its Parcham members. Taraki was declared President of the new Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, and Hafizullah Amin was named Vice Prime Minister and, a few months later, Prime Minister; the Khalq also retained control of key PDPA positions. [redacted]

25X1

The top leadership was composed of staunch ideologues who quickly took Afghanistan into the Soviet camp—a friendship treaty was signed in December 1978 that linked Moscow intimately to the future of the Kabul regime—and decreed a major reform program. Taraki, who was deposed and executed under still-mysterious circumstances in September 1979, was the father figure of the revolution. Amin, while working in Taraki's shadow, slowly stripped him of his real power. With Taraki's death, Amin became President and head of the party, and the strongman of Afghanistan. [redacted]

25X1

Amin was a ruthless, dedicated man who liked to be firmly in charge. After the coup, he steadily eliminated competitors and rival centers of power, even risking an extreme reduction of support for the Khalq in the party and military; alleged enemies of the regime were jailed and tortured in ever-larger numbers. With the purging of Taraki and his closest aides—most of whom had already been stripped of their power—Amin surrounded himself with trusted subordinates and placed members of his family in key military and internal security positions. Like many Afghans, he was suspicious and distrustful of the motives of others, including Soviet backers. His absorption in consolidating his own power and his independence finally cost him the support of the Soviets. [redacted]

Goals and Program

When Amin and Taraki first came to power, they embarked upon a program of modernization, designed, in part, to attract the support of ambitious youth who like themselves had been excluded from power. They expanded the responsibility of the bureaucracy and made Pashto, rather than Dari, the language of official business so that their new constituents from humble Pashtun backgrounds would have more opportunities in the government service. At the university, they purged the faculty, filled the empty slots with Khalq loyalists, and dramatically increased the size of the student body. [redacted]

The regime adopted a new language policy (copying that of the Soviet Union), which promoted the languages of Afghan minority groups to national status, and created more government places for the younger generation of the traditionally oppressed groups. Taraki and Amin also appointed more minority group members to their first Cabinet than ever before. The Khalq launched extensive youth programs and created a network of organizations among the young, propagandized among them, and sent the more promising to the Soviet Union for training. It continues to control young Afghans through the party. The Communist leaders calculated that any short-term lags in bureaucratic efficiency could be made up with large numbers of Soviet civilian advisers and that “in a country where the life expectancy is only forty . . . the

older opposition elements eventually will disappear from the stage.” In the eyes of Afghanistan’s new rulers, support of party goals by the country’s young people would help the regime survive the upheavals caused by the its wide-ranging reform programs. [redacted]

The PDPA set out to change Afghanistan quickly. To symbolize their intent, the party leaders eliminated the time-honored green flag associated with Islam and substituted a red flag of the future. Taraki, in his role as party elder statesman, decreed the party’s major reforms: education was to be secularized and females admitted to all schools throughout the country; the estates belonging to lay and religious families were to be confiscated and the land redistributed to peasant farmers; and the bride price as a regular feature of marriage arrangements was to be virtually abolished. Amin, the party strongman, sent military contingents—some with Soviet advisers—party loyalists, and dedicated cadres of young people to the provinces to see that the reforms were enacted. In a land where “no government has ever tried to govern the countryside directly,” the vast majority of the population saw a threat to their way of life. [redacted]

In their efforts to demonstrate their revolutionary authenticity and establish control, the Communists overstepped the limits by which Afghan governments traditionally had legitimated their rule. Although Amin shared his ruthlessness with past rulers, he sought—in contrast to his predecessors—to eliminate, rather than to compromise with, the old elite, to enhance the prestige of the Army over the fighting habits of the tribes, and to diminish the stature of Islam. He ended by affronting the Afghans’ pride of national independence by relying on thousands of hated Soviet civilian and military advisers. Although it retreated somewhat (to save face and concentrate on fighting, the regime declared that land and educational reforms had been achieved), the regime brought upon itself tribal wrath and civil war. With the even greater dependence of President Karmal upon the Soviets and his continued commitment to consolidate central authority, tribal resistance will persist and indeed grow. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

Civil War—Communism Versus Tribalism

Afghanistan is in a state of insurgency. The government controls major urban areas and main road connections—at least by day, in some places—with an Army and party thinned out by purges and defections, and supported by increasing amounts of Soviet advisers and aid. Throughout most of the countryside there is armed resistance to the regime's will, and military incursions occur from refugee bases in Pakistan. []

But tribal society is responding to a modern, well-organized threat in traditional terms. The tribes are fighting as they have fought for centuries: independently, locally, and with a minimum of leadership. Prominent oldtime leaders have sought refuge in Peshawar in Pakistan, where they remain poorly organized and disunited. Drawn mainly from the old elite of tribal chieftains, landowners, and prominent religious families, they appear unable to come together without a strong figure having the political skill to contain their mutual competitiveness. Former King Zahir remains aloof in Rome; there appears to be no one on the scene with the adeptness of his father, Nadir, who assiduously cultivated supporters from among the old elite during Afghanistan's last period of upheaval in 1929. Today, anyone from this old upper class—with its associations to Daoud and the old regime—probably would have little appeal to the relatively small but crucial group of young people who have acquired the modern skills necessary to run a bureaucracy and wish to avoid the appearance of moving backward in time. []

Within Afghanistan, local tribal groupings have taken up arms to regain their time-honored autonomy and throw off controls that began even under Daoud. The fighting men are joined not into a disciplined cohesive force but rather into spontaneous formations of small, local *lashkars* (war parties), with members motivated not only by political and religious reasons but also by the exhilaration of a call to arms, the chance to even some old personal scores, and sheer banditry. (A recent European captive never saw groups larger than 10 to 20 fighting men.) In the mountainous terrain of rural Afghanistan, it is easy enough to take up a village-made Enfield rifle, besiege a military outpost or

attack a passing truck loaded with goods, and then disappear into a remote, inaccessible gorge. Without leadership, the tribesmen are far more likely to bring Afghanistan to anarchy, rather than to defeat or to impose their will upon Communist-controlled Kabul. []

25X1

The Soviets saw that Amin's greatest threat was a sapping of his regime from within. His Communist party and military forces had been ruthlessly purged and repurged so that only those personally loyal to him dominated, and the cities—after revolts in Herat, Jalalabad, and the capital itself—were controlled through somewhat totalitarian means. In addition to the civil war in the countryside, Amin faced the dual challenge of growing defections from the government and Army, and increasing public apathy and resentment. The Soviets are trying to recoup the situation with a new President, but Karmal's government will also remain isolated in a traditional environment, with no resources other than its own determination and vast amounts of Soviet aid. []

25X1

25X1

There will probably be a lull in the fighting during the hard Afghan winter; when the snows come, ground movement will be difficult in the mountainous, arid terrain, and the tribal fighters might lack sufficient food and shelter in their mountain hideouts. Furthermore, the exhausted population will need food—farmers fought, rather than planted, this past spring—and the Karmal regime can supply urban and provincial centers by means of aid delivered by Soviet planes. During the lull, it will need to shore up military and urban bases in preparation for the renewal of insurgency in the spring. So long as the population responds to his government in traditionally fragmented ways—and there is no indication that it is responding otherwise—Karmal has a good chance of hanging on with continued Soviet assistance. []

25X1

The Communists, however, have paid a high price for attempting to overturn—rather than compromise with—tradition. Like a politically isolated colonial

1 power, Karmal now rules in a state of siege, albeit in his own society, heading a party that now is characterized by fear and internal distrust, limited to hegemony in cities, and dependent for the very long term on external military and civilian aid. As long as the fighting continues, Afghanistan will not be ruled very much differently than it was in the past—the writ, or authority, of the government will not run far beyond urban areas, and the government's plans for reform will take second place to its efforts to secure control of the country.

Sources of Copyrighted Photographs

Page 4: Associated Press

Page 6: New York Times News Service