

# Afghanistan Under the Khalq

by Louis Dupree



**T**he leftist coup d'état of April 27, 1978, which toppled the government of Afghanistan headed by President Mohammad Daoud was brought on by a series of accidents. Its outcome was also the result of accident and makeshift arrangements—of spur-of-the-moment action rather than of elaborate planning.<sup>1</sup>

The events which precipitated the coup began with bloodshed on April 17, when Mir Akbar Khyber, a well-known leftist ideologue, was murdered in Kabul by persons whose identity has still not been determined.<sup>2</sup> Massive demonstrations at Khyber's burial rites on April 19, during which an estimated 10,000–15,000 mourners took to the streets and marched past the United States Embassy shouting anti-American slogans, surprised both foreign and Afghan observers. Alarmed, the government of Mohammad Daoud arrested the leading politicians of the Left, but not before Hafizullah Amin, strong man of the *Khalq* (People's) party, contacted military cadres sympathetic to the Left with which he had long been in touch. A makeshift plan was drawn up, and the coup was launched on the morning of April 27, as the cabinet met to consider the fate of the people who had been arrested.

When the coup succeeded less than 24 hours later, the five-year-old Republic of Afghanistan lay shattered. President Daoud and some 30 members of his family—men, women, and children—had been killed. An additional thousand persons had probably died in

fighting in and around Kabul. In their first public statements, the leaders of the newly declared Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) insisted that they were not Communists and that their policies would be based on Afghan nationalism, respect for Islam, economic and social justice, nonalignment in foreign affairs, and respect for all international agreements signed by previous Afghan governments. Few could object to such noble intentions. But as often happens after bloody changes of power such as this, the new regime's primary interest soon became the pursuit of legitimacy and security, at the expense of the human rights or economic well-being of the country's population.

Before trying to understand what has happened in Afghanistan since the coup, however, it is necessary to have some sense of the people and parties who made it. In the following pages, the background of the Left in Afghanistan since the early part of this century will be summarized. Then the policies adopted by the DRA regime and the tensions within the ruling coalition will be examined in order to clarify the forces which have determined the course of events in the country since April 1978—including the rise of opposition movements fighting to topple the new order. The regime's international status—i.e., its ties with the Soviet Union, its difficulties with its eastern and western neighbors, and its effect on superpower rivalry in Central Asia and the Persian Gulf—will also be discussed. A concluding section will be devoted to prognoses for the future.

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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed discussion of the accidents which led to the coup, see Louis Dupree, "Inside Afghanistan, Yesterday and Today: A Strategic Appraisal," *Strategic Studies: Journal of the Institute of Strategic Studies* (Islamabad), Vol. 2, No. 3, Spring 1979, pp. 64–83. In addition, I am preparing an hour-by-hour account of the coup for publication as an American Universities Field Staff (AUFS) report.

<sup>2</sup>A blanket of silence descended over the killing after the coup. The question still remains whether Khyber was killed by the Daoud government or by a rival leftist group.

Who actually made the coup against the Daoud regime? Initial Western press reports erroneously portrayed the leaders of the DRA as unknown quantities, members of a shadowy, illegal, underground Communist group. Political parties, however, had long flourished in Afghanistan as "extralegal" entities, with no legislation in existence to explicitly prohibit or permit them.<sup>3</sup> The Constitution passed by the Great National Assembly (*Loya Jirga*) in 1964 called for the enactment of a Political Parties Law, and parliament actually passed such a bill. King Mohammad Zahir's refusal to promulgate the law was at least partly responsible for the overthrow of the monarchy in 1973 and left unregulated the status of political parties of all hues in the country.

### Leftist Movements, 1917-78

On the left of the political spectrum, we know that as early as the 1920's Afghan socialists traveled to and from the USSR, but primarily as individuals. No socialist agitation took place in Afghanistan because the Soviets wanted to cultivate better relations with the reform-minded and anti-British King Amanullah (1919-29). Under Soviet influence, Amanullah tried to move his country too far, too fast, too soon, and with too little internal support,<sup>4</sup> however, and his downfall during the 1929 tribal revolts which rocked the country was a setback for Soviet policy. General Mohammad Nadir, a distant cousin of Amanullah, came to the throne and followed cautious, conservative policies. These policies were continued after his assassination in 1933. Nadir's son, Mohammad Zahir (1933-73), became king, but Zahir's uncles held the reins of power until 1953.

In spite of periodic persecutions, the sparks of liberalism remained alive in Afghanistan during this period, fanned in 1947 by the creation of the reform-minded brotherhood, *Wikh-i-Zalmayan* (Awakened Youth).<sup>5</sup> The first public acknowledgment of the existence in the country of organized leftist movements occurred during the "Liberal Parliament" period (1949-52) which began two years later, when the government held relatively free elections (by Af-



A demonstration in support of the revolutionary government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, in the streets of Kabul in May 1979. The women in the foreground bear portraits of President Nur Mohammad Taraki.

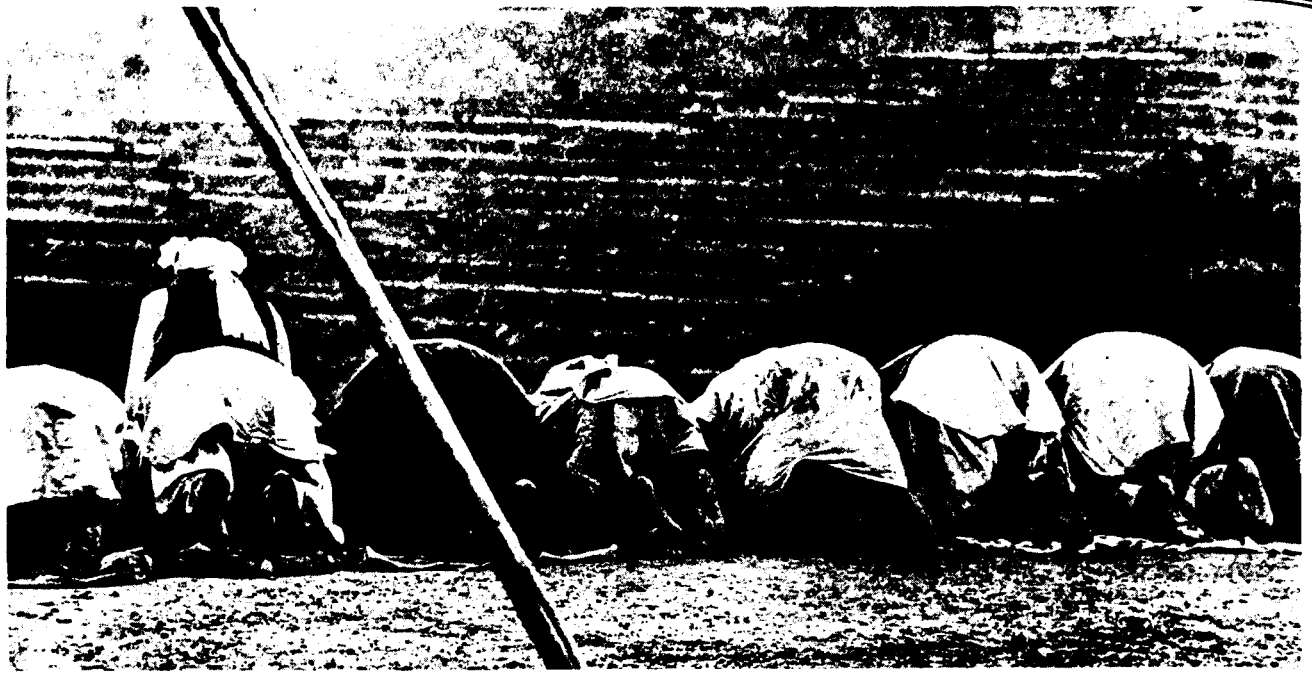
—TASS from Soviet.

ghan standards). About 50 left-oriented candidates won and occupied seats in the 120-member parliament which replaced what had previously been a rubber-stamp, primarily appointed legislative body. A number of new newspapers appeared, published by urban liberal or regional, pro-Pushtun political factions. Principal among them were *Nida-yi-Khalq* (Voice of the People), *Watan* (Homeland), and *Angar* (Burning Embers). Such newspaper titles were themselves indicative of the ferment in the land. Conservative elements in the royal family interpreted the rising popularity of the leftist/liberal opposition as a threat to the status quo. As a result, the government crushed

<sup>3</sup> See Louis Dupree, "A Note on Afghanistan," *AUFS Reports: South Asia Series* (Hanover, NH), Vol. 4, No. 2, Appendix A, December 1971, for a list of extralegal parties and their chief functionaries.

<sup>4</sup> L. Adamec, *Afghanistan's Foreign Affairs to the Mid-Twentieth Century*, Tucson, AZ, University of Arizona Press, 1974; L. Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1973; and R. T. Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan, 1914-1929*, Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1973.

<sup>5</sup> R. Akramovich, *Outline History of Afghanistan After the Second World War*, Moscow, Nauka, 1966, pp. 45-67; Mir Mohammad Ghoobar, *Afghanistan dar-Masir-i-Tarikh* (Afghanistan's Path Through History), Kabul, Afghanistan Ministry of Information and Culture, 1968; and L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 496-97. For an excellent, measured, leftist interpretation of modern historical processes in Afghanistan, see F. Halliday, "Revolution in Afghanistan," *New Left Review* (London), November-December 1978, pp. 3-44.



*Tradition in rural Afghanistan: peasants praying toward Mecca.*

—Lawrence Bran/Camera Press.

the nascent liberal movement before elections scheduled for 1952. Its leaders were arrested, and its newspapers were banned.

The impact of the "Liberal Parliament" period lingered, however, and this and other factors led Lieutenant-General Mohammad Daoud Khan, first cousin and brother-in-law of the king, to seize power from his uncle, Prime Minister Shah Mahmud Khan, in a bloodless coup in September 1953.<sup>6</sup> To balance the tilt of the previous regime away from the Soviet Union and toward the West, Prime Minister Daoud promptly invited—and received—large infusions of Soviet economic and military assistance for his country. Contrary to widespread belief, Soviet aid to Afghanistan did not begin with Daoud's rise to power. It had its origins in Soviet subsidies granted in 1919. But there can be little doubt that with the turn of events precipitated by Daoud's action, Afghanistan's "big gamble" on the USSR had begun.

Why did the Soviets take the plunge into foreign assistance for Afghanistan so soon after World War II? The answer is rather complicated, but boils down to a theme articulated repeatedly by Nikita Khrushchev when he was First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU): the ultimate victory of

world communism over capitalism through peaceful competition in the developing world.<sup>7</sup> In part, Soviet planners took their cue from the success of the Marshall Plan, under which the United States helped rejuvenate the wrecked economy of Western Europe. Why, reasoned Soviet planners, could economic assistance not be used to gain control of selected nations in the developing world? In short, Afghanistan became a sort of "economic Korea," that is, a testing ground on which to determine whether or not simple economic penetration could enable the USSR to shape the recipient nation's social and political institutions, and on which to gauge the economic responses of the West—particularly the United States—just as Korea had constituted an arena for testing the military responses and perseverance of the US and its allies.

Of course, the analogy with the Marshall Plan was flawed, for it overlooked—as both the US and the USSR have been wont to do—the human and cultural factors involved in economic development. To institutionalize change in the economic sector of a developing society requires shifts in emphasis (at times for better, at times for worse) in values, attitudes, and belief systems. World War II may have smashed the economic superstructure of Western Europe, but it did not alter its sociopolitical belief systems or institutions.

<sup>6</sup>The other factors included Afghanistan's tilt to the West, the slow pace of development projects, disagreements on the "Pushtunistan" issue, and Daoud's personal ambition.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, N. Khrushchev, "On Peaceful Coexistence," *Foreign Affairs* (New York, NY), October 1959, pp. 1–18.

Therefore, only money and machines, not whole new sets of values, were needed for recovery. In Afghanistan, on the other hand, what was needed was a sociopolitical transformation to accommodate the requirements of economic growth in a country where little development in the modern, post-industrial-revolution sense of the word had ever taken place.

As might have been expected under these circumstances, the first decade of Daoud Khan's rule (1953-63) brought rapid change in certain economic areas—especially in the development of the country's economic infrastructure<sup>8</sup>—and certain social institutions; but political growth virtually stagnated.<sup>9</sup> A flare-up of the Pushtunistan dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan<sup>10</sup> in September 1961 resulted in the closing of the border between the two countries and the loss to Afghanistan of access to its Indian Ocean trade outlets. During the subsequent 18 months, Afghan dependency on transit facilities through the USSR increased tremendously until in March 1963 Prime Minister Daoud, sensing that greater balance between East and West had to be restored to his country's trade and aid position, took a step few strongmen have considered and resigned at the height of his personal power. After considerable negotiation brokered by the Shah of Iran, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border was reopened in May of the same year.

Daoud's resignation heralded another abortive experiment in parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy. A *Loya Jirgah* (Great National Assembly), partly appointed and partly elected, passed a new constitution which was promulgated by King Mohammad Zahir in October 1964. The country held two elections under this constitution—in 1965 and 1969—but several factors inhibited the institutionalization of the process, and the third election, scheduled for August-September 1973, was never held.

During the ten years of parliamentarism under Mohammad Zahir, the king vacillated and repeatedly refused to implement constitutional provisions for the

authorization of political parties and the creation of provincial and municipal councils. Some of the king's closest advisers insisted that legalizing political parties would permit "Communist" (by which they meant "antimonarchist") groups to increase their strength. But the truth is that leftist parties were already functioning in the country, encouraged in their activism by the liberalized Press Law of 1965.

The first important leftist newspaper founded during this period was *Khalq* (The Masses, or The People), published by Nur Mohammad Taraki and edited by the poet Bareq Shafiyye. Six issues of the paper appeared between April 11 and May 16, 1966. The *Khalq* organization, headed by Taraki, announced that it would work to alleviate "the boundless agonies of the oppressed peoples of Afghanistan" and linked itself with the forces of international socialism in statements such as, "... the main issue of contemporary times and the center of class struggle on a worldwide basis, which began with the Great October Socialist Revolution, is the struggle between international socialism and international capitalism."

Outcries against *Khalq* arose from many quarters, particularly from among religious leaders in the parliament's *Meshrano Jirgah* (Upper House), 20 members of which demanded a governmental investigation.<sup>11</sup> Responding to accusations that it was anti-Islamic, antimonarchist, and anticonstitutional, *Khalq* asserted that it was not opposed to the principles of Islam, that it favored the fundamental rights embodied in the constitution, and that it recognized the necessity of the monarchy "at this stage of Afghanistan's development." Still, since *Khalq's* advocacy of land reform and of public as opposed to private ownership of certain types of property was widely held to be contrary to the tenets of Islam, the Attorney-General's office, invoking Article 1 of the 1965 Press Law which made one of the law's goals the safeguarding of the fundamentals of Islam,<sup>12</sup> banned the organization's paper on May 23, 1966. Even many non-leftist Afghans considered this decision a mistake.

Slightly over a year later, the *Khalq* organization split into two groups, *Khalq* proper, led by Taraki, and the breakaway *Parcham*, led by Babrak Karmal,

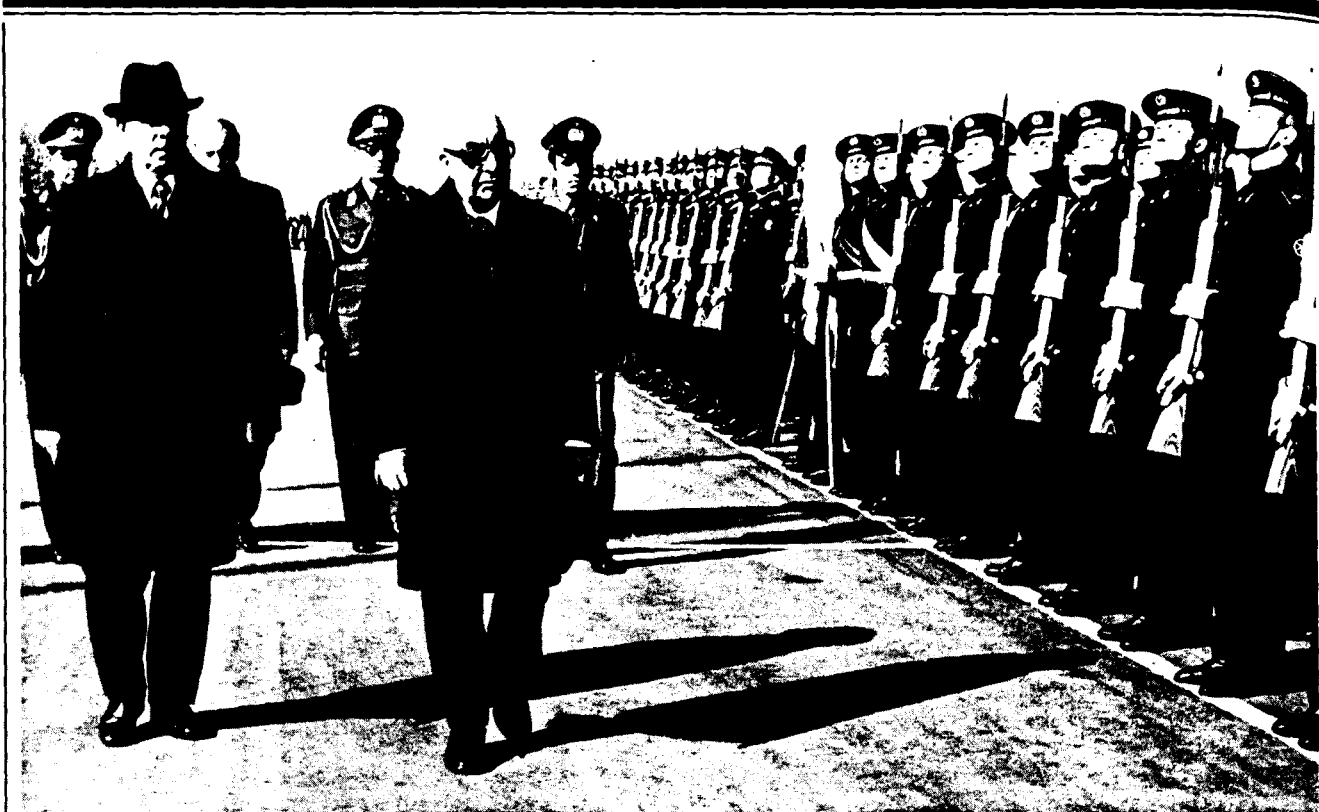
<sup>8</sup>One interesting side-effect of development under Daoud was that great-power competition evolved into de facto (if not de jure) cooperation. For example, the United States assisted the Afghans in building roads from south to north; the USSR, from north to south. The roads obviously had to link up. For other examples, see L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, op. cit., pp. 526-30.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 530-38.

<sup>10</sup>The dispute centers on the status of the Pushtun tribes on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line. See *ibid.*, p. 485 and *passim*; and L. Dupree, "Toward Representative Government in Afghanistan, Part I: The First Five Steps," *AUFS Reports: Asia* (Hanover, NH), No. 1, February 1978, pp. 7-9.

<sup>11</sup>The *Meshrano Jirgah* had 84 members. The king appointed 28; each of the 28 provinces appointed 1; and each provincial council was to elect 1. Since provincial councils were never elected, though, the *Meshrano Jirgah* functioned—many Afghan lawyers say unconstitutionally—with only two thirds of its legally mandated membership.

<sup>12</sup>Paragraph 3 of the first article of the law stipulated that "The goals which the law aims to secure consist of: safeguarding the fundamentals of Islam, constitutional monarchy, and other values enshrined in the Constitution."



The late Mohammad Daoud, right, then President of the Republic of Afghanistan, reviews an honor guard at Moscow's Vnukovo Airport in April 1977. At the left is N.V. Podgornyy, then Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

—TASS from Sovfoto.

whose policy and personality conflicts with Taraki will be discussed later in this article. The new faction's newspaper, *Parcham* (Banner), published and edited at first by Mohammad Suleyman Laek, a poet, and edited at the end by Mir Akbar Khyber, first appeared on March 14, 1968. Shortly afterward, on April 4, another breakaway group from *Khalq* put out the first issue of a paper called *Shu'la-yi-Jawed* (Eternal Flame), of which Dr. Rahim Mahmudi served as editor and publisher. Both newspapers continued to appear until banned during the 1969 election campaign.

*Shu'la*, as the faction behind *Shu'la-yi-Jawed* was called, was led by Mohammad Osman Landai, the brothers Sadeq and Akram Yayari, and the Mahmudi family and was often referred to as "pro-Peking," while *Parcham* was considered "pro-Moscow." These were very loose terms, at best, of course. In addition, many urban Afghans believed that a connection existed between the ruling "establishment" and *Parcham*, which they jokingly, but pointedly, called the "Royal Communist Party." *Khalq* maintained an acknowledged independent stance. A final split in the

Left occurred when Taher Badakhshi left *Parcham* to form *Setem-i-Meli* (Against National Oppression), whose manifesto called for Maoist-type mobilization and a localization of power in the countryside, i.e., for a combination of Maoism and ethnocentrism.<sup>13</sup>

With the king undecided on the direction in which he wanted his country to go and leftist organizations multiplying, other forces came into play. Former Prime Minister Daoud, convinced that Afghanistan's experiment in democracy had failed, seized power on July 17, 1973, in an almost bloodless coup aimed not only against the government but against the king and the monarchy as well. Daoud was supported by large numbers of young, reform-minded army, air force, and police officers who, although trained for the most part in the USSR, were more nationalist than Communist in outlook. Daoud proclaimed the Republic of Afghanistan and was declared its Founder, President, and Prime Minister.

<sup>13</sup>For other leftist papers that appeared and disappeared during this period, see L. Dupree, "A Note on Afghanistan, 1971," loc. cit.

Initially, Babrak Karmal's *Parcham* supported the Daoud republic, and immediately after the coup Daoud sent about 160 enthusiastic young *Parchamis* to the provinces as administrators, to spread the message of the new regime. However, the rural provincial elites effectively isolated these eager but inexperienced urban officials from the people. Frustrated, most of them cynically turned either as corrupt as their predecessors or more so; returned to Kabul and resigned or were dismissed; or decided to work within existing rural patterns to bring about change. It is not surprising, therefore, that by mid-1975 Daoud had effectively reduced the power of *Parcham*.

This experience over, Daoud moved to push ahead with his reform programs—at least on paper.<sup>14</sup> In early 1977, a partly elected, partly appointed *Loya Jirgah* approved a new constitution. The nation waited for the president to appoint a new cabinet, and most observers hoped that he would bring in new blood, including some moderate leftists. But at this crucial turning point—in the opinion of this author, the crucial turning point—Mohammad Daoud reverted to the behavior of an old tribal khan. He appointed friends, sons of friends, sychophants, and even collateral members of the deposed royal family.

Disdaining to actually rely on this official cabinet, Daoud began to depend more and more on an "inner cabinet" consisting of Sayyid Abdullillah (Vice President of the Republic), General Ghulam Haider Rasuli (Minister of National Defense), Abdul Qader-Nuristani (Minister of the Interior), and Mohammad Naim (Daoud's brother). A constitutional cabinet crisis developed when Daoud personally appointed the Central Committee (*Shura Markazi*) of the National Revolutionary Party (*Hezb-i-Inqelab-i-Meli*), the one party permitted under the constitution. Six ministers resigned in protest. They withdrew their resignations at the personal request of the president, but it was clear that Daoud was in trouble.

Meanwhile, *Khalq* and *Parcham* reunited in July 1977 to oppose the regime. But even they did not dream that events would move as quickly as they did in 1978 and that they would find themselves in power on April 27.

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## The First Cabinet of the DRA

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The *Khalq-Parcham* regime installed after the coup of April 27, 1978, moved quickly to create a

framework within which it could establish its "legitimacy." On April 30, Decree No. 1 of the 35-member Revolutionary Council in control after the coup announced that the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan would be governed by decrees and regulations issued by the council itself and that Nur Mohammad Taraki, "the great national and revolutionary figure of Afghanistan," who had held the post of Secretary-General of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (*Jamiat-i-Demokratiqi-yi Khalq*—PDPA) since its formation in 1965, had been chosen as Chairman of the Revolutionary Council and Prime Minister.

Decree No. 2, issued on the following day, named 21 people selected by the council to serve as cabinet members. Of the ministers appointed, 13 had been full or alternate members of the original 1965 Central Committee of the PDPA, which had a total of only 9 full and 10 alternate members. Three of the appointees were military men, reflecting the same proportional representation that the military had on the Revolutionary Council doing the appointing. At least 10 of the civilian appointees had participated in the 1965 and 1969 national elections, and five of these had been elected. None of the 21 had ever denied leftist political leanings, and none had ever expressed loyalty to any country other than Afghanistan. To the extent that it can be determined, none had ever attended or been invited to attend international Communist meetings.

Those looking for signs of Soviet influence on the course of events might charge that Moscow has often camouflaged its role during transitional periods and that the absence of obvious representatives of Soviet interests in the cabinet immediately after the Afghan coup simply reflected the way Communists operate under similar circumstances. But a case can also be made, as this author tried to point out shortly after the coup, that "governments, like persons, should be considered innocent until proven guilty."<sup>15</sup>

Except for the 61-year-old Taraki, the civilian cabinet members ranged between 40 and 50 years of age. The three military men named as ministers were younger still. Only Taraki and Babrak could be even remotely connected with activities of the *Wikh-i-Zalmayan* period. Most of the others cut their political teeth during the decade of constitutional "new democracy" between 1963 and 1973. Five of the ministers had been jailed at least once for their political activities.

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<sup>14</sup>L. Dupree, "Toward Representative Government in Afghanistan, Parts I and II," *AUFS Reports: Asia*, Nos. 1 and 2, February 1978.

<sup>15</sup>*The New York Times*, May 28, 1978. A final observation in my letter, which the newspaper did not publish was: "Their [the government's] actions will speak louder than innuendos."

Aside from the age factor, some interesting characteristics of the original post-coup cabinet also become apparent when its membership is broken down by party affiliation, educational background, occupation, and ethnolinguistic group. Eleven of the ministers were *Khalq* members, but two of these had considered themselves independent prior to the coup. Ten ministers belonged to *Parcham*.<sup>16</sup> Ten cabinet members had received some advanced education in the United States; two, in Egypt; and one each, in France and West Germany. Four had studied exclusively in Afghanistan. Only the three military men in the cabinet had received training in the USSR, and they considered themselves nationalists rather than pro-Russian.<sup>17</sup> Almost all of the ministers knew English, while only four (including the three military men) knew Russian. With regard to occupation, 11 cabinet members had held government jobs at the time of the coup—three in the military, two on the faculty of Kabul University, one on the staff of Radio Afghanistan, and five in the civil service. In addition, the group included three unemployed writers (including journalists); two doctors, two lawyers, and two academics—all unemployed; and a landlord. In terms of ethnolinguistic background, 11 ministers were Pushtun, the dominant ethnolinguistic group in the country, which accounts for about 50 percent of the population. Six were Persian-speaking Tajik; two, Persian-speaking Hazara; and two, Turkic-speaking Uzbek. All spoke both Pashto and Persian, the two dominant languages of Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup>

An argument could be made based on these data that the post-coup cabinet headed by Taraki was moderately representative of Afghan social and cultural realities. But there would be little point in pursuing such an argument since the cabinet alignment established by Revolutionary Council Decree No. 2 was very short-lived.

Below the cabinet level, the new regime tried to enlist the support of some elements of Afghan society and smashed others. The jails quickly overflowed with surviving members of the royal family (uncles, aunts, cousins, men, women, and children),<sup>19</sup> as well as with large numbers of qualified technocrats—able administrators with technical skills—whose sole transgression was that they had held responsible positions in previous regimes. The DRA replaced these invaluable individuals mostly with *Khalq* members, qualified or not. Estimates of the pre-coup *Khalq* membership varied from 10,000 to 50,000, but in Afghanistan the safest way to look at statistics of this sort is often to lop off the last zero. The cabinet ministers of the new regime were generally competent. But because of the restricted size of the manpower pool from which administrators had to be chosen, the government encountered a great shortage of able and experienced, action-oriented, middle- and upper-level administrators.

## The Coalition Splits

Generally, when coalitions of the Left or Right succeed in toppling a regime, fission occurs almost immediately, and the *Khalq-Parcham* combination proved no exception. With the leaders of the order eliminated, the dominant *Khalq* element of the new leadership decided to remove Babrak and his *Parcham* followers from positions of power.

Babrak's political career indicated a certain flexibility and willingness to bend with the wind, combined with tremendous ambition which Taraki and the PDPA could hardly ignore. As has already been discussed, Babrak, a charismatic former student leader and a spellbinding orator, broke away from Taraki's *Khalq* in 1967, taking with him such leading leftists as Mir

<sup>16</sup> The original cabinet roster was as follows (M=full member of 1965 Central Committee of PDPA; A=alternate member of the 1965 Central Committee; \* =no longer in cabinet). From *Khalq*: Nur Mohammad Taraki (M)—Prime Minister; Hafizullah Amin (A)—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs; Abdul Karim Misdaq (A)—Minister of Finance; Dr. Saleh Mohammad Ziray (M)—Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation; Abdul Hakim Sherai (A)—Minister of Justice and Attorney-General; Dr. Shah Wali (M)—Minister of Public Health; Ghulam Dastgir Panjshiri (M)—Minister of Education; Mohammad Esmail Danesh (A)—Minister of Mines and Industries; Mohammad Mansur Hashemi—Minister of Water and Power; Mahmud Suma—Minister of Higher Education; Abdul Qodus Ghorbandi—Minister of Commerce. From *Parcham*: \*Babrak Karmal (M)—Deputy Prime Minister; \*Colonel Abdul Qader—Minister of National Defense; \*Nur Ahmad Nur (M)—Minister of the Interior; \*Soltan Ali Keshitmand (M)—Minister of Planning; \*Mohammad Suleyman Laek (A)—Minister of Radio and Television; \*Major

Mohammad Rafi—Minister of Public Works; \*Dr. Anahita Ratebzad—Minister of Social Affairs and Tourism; \*Nezamoddin Tahzib—Minister of Frontier Affairs; Major Mohammad Aslam Watanjar—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Communications; Mohammad Hasan Bareq-Shafii (A)—Minister of Information and Culture.

<sup>17</sup> Apparently, as one Kabul wit remarked, the United States trains Communists, while the Soviets produce anti-Communists.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the various ethnolinguistic groups in Afghanistan, see L. Dupree, *Afghanistan*, op. cit., pp. 55-247; idem, "Anthropology in Afghanistan," *AUFS Reports: South Asia Series*, No. 20 (5), December 1976; and idem, "Language and Politics in Afghanistan," *Contributions to Asian Studies* (Leiden), Vol. 11, 1978, pp. 131-41.

<sup>19</sup> Thus far, 73 women and children have been released, most of whom have joined relatives outside Afghanistan. For the list, see *Kabul Times* (Kabul), Oct. 26, 1978.

Akbar Khyber, Mohammad Suleyman Laek, and Dr. Anahita Ratebzad.<sup>20</sup> Babrak chose to work within the political system during the 1963-73 parliamentary period and dominated session after session of the national legislature with his eloquence and showmanship. His clear purpose was to stay visible and viable. At the same time, he maintained close ties with the Soviet embassy. Babrak had some followers among younger military officers, but his main support came from urban students and intellectuals.

All of this was in marked contrast to Taraki's political posture. After Taraki participated (and was defeated) in the 1965 elections, he decided to withdraw from public view. He and *Khalq* favored a less flamboyant, more evolutionary approach to power, slowly recruiting cadres among the military, middle- and lower-range civil servants, the small but growing number of urban workers, and, particularly, provincial teachers, who were largely drawn from rural backgrounds. *Khalq* also took a harder line than *Parcham* on the Pushtunistan dispute with Pakistan.

Babrak, like Daoud, sensed the demise of the "new democracy" in the early 1970's. The inaction of the parliament and its interminable squabbles with the executive had caused many observers to believe that the king would call off the elections set for 1973, dissolve the legislature, and rule by royal decree. Babrak threw in the lot of *Parcham* with the Daoud plotters. As noted above, Daoud exploited *Parcham* and by mid-1975 had effectively discredited it as a serious political force. Ever resilient, though, Babrak negotiated a reunion with *Khalq* in July 1977, and by May 1978 found himself a Vice Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

During the hectic first few months of consolidation of the DRA regime, the behind-the-scenes struggle for power intensified. Babrak did not remain idle. He tried to elicit support from such important nationalist figures as Abdul Qader, a colonel who had been a key figure in both the 1973 and 1978 coups in Kabul and who had been named Minister of National Defense and promoted to Major-General by Taraki, but Qader rejected his overtures. The important military units stationed in Kabul also favored Taraki and *Khalq* strong man Amin. The *Parcham* leaders found even their Soviet friends pragmatic—and unhelpful.

Once the inability of *Parcham*'s leaders to defend their position became clear, the *Khalq*-dominated Revolutionary Council under Taraki moved quickly against them. Most, including Babrak, were "exiled"



*Abdul Qader, Afghan military figure promoted to major-general and named Minister of National Defense in the Revolutionary Council established after the 1978 coup in Afghanistan. Qader was one of a number of Muslim nationalists expelled from that body in August 1978.*

—Wide World.

to ambassadorships<sup>21</sup>—a method which Daoud Khan had used effectively earlier to immobilize elements opposed to his regime.

With the *Parcham* elite defanged—at least temporarily—the *Khalq* government felt free to move against a more formidable group, the powerful nationalist-Muslim factions both inside and outside the cabinet. In late August, the government arrested (among other representatives of these groups) Major-General Qader, Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Shapur Ahmadzai, and Dr. Mir Ali Akbar, President of Jamhuriat Hospital, and charged them with plotting to overthrow the regime. The government also collected evidence which led to the arrest of two

<sup>20</sup> As indicated in fn. 16, Laek and Ratebzad both ultimately became *Parcham* members of the first post-coup cabinet.

<sup>21</sup> In July 1979, Babrak was posted to Prague; Nur Mohammad Nur, to Washington; Abdul Wakil, to London; and Mahmud Baryalay (Babrak's brother), to Islamabad. The only woman in the cabinet, Minister of Social Affairs and Tourism Dr. Anahita Ratebzad, was sent to Belgrade. Upon her departure, her ministry was abolished.



other cabinet members: the Minister of Education, Lieutenant-Colonel Mohammad Rafi, who had been a key figure in the April 27 coup, and Sultan Ali Keshtmand, the Minister of Planning. Nizamuddin Tahzib, the Minister of Frontier Affairs, was placed under house arrest, though the nature of his ties to the others arrested was a matter of speculation in Kabul. It was clear, however, that all those arrested, except Shapur Ahmadzai, had *Parcham* connections.

The regime extracted confessions from all of these individuals by the means used in Afghanistan regardless of the regime in power—physical and mental torture, threats to family members, etc. The confessions were broadcast over Radio Afghanistan, and the government-controlled press media published facsimiles in the handwriting of the accused, a gimmick that past regimes also had used to “legitimize” confessions. Babrak was depicted as the instigator and ringleader of the plotters, but most of those involved appeared to be more nationalist-Muslim and in favor of a genuinely nonaligned Afghanistan. The Revolutionary Council expelled Babrak, Qader, Nur Ahmad Nur, Keshtmand, Rafi, and Dr. Anahita from the PDPA, and in October it ordered all the *Parcham* ambassadors home. Under the circumstances, they refused to comply, and they currently live somewhere in Eastern Europe.<sup>22</sup> Tahzib was dismissed from his cabinet post, expelled from the PDPA Central Committee, and downgraded to the simple status of “party rank and file.”

### Reform Programs of the *Khalq* Regime

Having preempted the leftist and nationalist-Muslim opposition, the *Khalq* regime introduced a set of new administrative procedures and announced a series of far-reaching reforms. As of this writing (July 1979), eight separate decrees have been promulgated by the Revolutionary Council.<sup>23</sup> The first two have already been discussed. Decree No. 3, issued on May 14, 1978, abrogated Daoud's 1973 constitution and established legal procedures to be followed until a new one could be written. Basically, the interim arrangement left the existing legal system intact, but a military

court was founded “to try persons who have committed offenses against the Revolution.” The decree also gave across-the-board promotions to lower ranks in the civil service and the military, in an attempt to broaden the regime's base of support.

Three decrees followed on June 12, 1978. Decree No. 4 announced a new design for the national flag and emblem: solid red with golden symbols. Decree No. 5 withdrew Afghan citizenship from 23 members of the royal family, most of whom were already living in Italy or Iran. And Decree No. 6, potentially of much greater significance than the other two, was a noble attempt to eliminate usury in the countryside. Decree No. 7, promulgated on October 17, 1978, confirmed the equal rights of women (already recognized by previous Afghan constitutions), regularized dowry and marriage expenses, and forbade forced marriages.

Finally, Decree No. 8, which appeared on November 28, 1978, introduced land reforms which laid stress on the private ownership of land, though within established limits. The decree encouraged the formation of cooperatives to facilitate the provision of credit to farmers and the distribution of fertilizer, seed, and other agricultural necessities. On paper, the land reforms appeared to be a mixture of idealized Maoist localization of power and of Yugoslav-style individual ownership within cooperatives. No mention was made of rural collectivization.

The Revolutionary Council also issued a number of laws and regulations which were for the most part charters to fight corruption and to assist in the creation of cooperatives and agricultural credit and loan



A 1979 photo of Afghan peasants who had gained ownership of land under reforms initiated by the revolutionary regime in Kabul.

<sup>22</sup> No one seems to know exactly where. Rumors are that the Kremlin is keeping the *Parcham* leadership under wraps as a possible alternate cabinet if the Taraki-Amin regime collapses. This is unlikely, but the possibility cannot be completely discounted.

<sup>23</sup> Full English-language texts can be obtained from the Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in Washington, DC, or can be found in the *Afghanistan Council Newsletter* published by the Asia Society, 112 East 64th Street, New York, NY 10021.

facilities. The "Law Regulating Duties and Legislative Procedures of the Revolutionary Council" issued on March 31, 1979, gave the Revolutionary Council unlimited power to govern and was in effect an interim constitution.

Few observers could disagree with the ideals expressed in Decrees 6, 7, and 8 and in the laws and regulations which accompanied them. It is interesting in this regard that some of the measures proposed by the DRA regime resembled in a rough way laws and reform programs which had been proposed by Daoud. The mechanisms established for implementation appeared feasible.<sup>24</sup> However, to implement reforms, any regime needs both expertise and stability, and it soon became clear that the DRA regime was to have little of either.

On March 28, 1979, Hafizullah Amin, who had engineered the sudden coup which toppled Daoud, finally made it to the top of the DRA hierarchy. He became Prime Minister, while retaining the foreign affairs portfolio, in the "new" 18-man cabinet announced by Taraki, who remained President of the Revolutionary Council, Secretary-General of the PDPA, and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Observers were thus faced with the curious spectacle of a "revolutionary" regime run by a prime minister who had been trained at Columbia University in the United States; and by a president who years earlier had served as cultural officer in the Embassy of the Royal Government of Afghanistan in Washington, DC (1952-53), on the Kabul staff of the US Agency for International Development (1955-58), and as a translator for the US Embassy in Afghanistan (1962-63).

All the ministers in the cabinet were *Khalq*, or *Parcham* converted to *Khalq*, and only two really new faces appeared in the "new" ministerial lineup—Engineer Sadiq Alam Yar as Minister of Planning and Khayal Mohammad Katawazi as Minister for Radio and Television. The places occupied earlier by *Parcham* and nationalist-Muslim representatives had already been filled by *Khalq* stalwarts: Abdul Rashid Jalili (Education), Sher Jan Mazdoor Yar (Interior), Sahib Jan Sahrayi (Frontier Affairs), and Sayyid Mohammad Gulabzoi (Communications).

Thus, the "new" cabinet legitimized Amin as number one in the power elite, while Taraki continued to play the role of "the Great Leader of the Afghan people." *Khalq* tightened its control at all levels of government in Kabul. But the native experts whose



*Hafizullah Amin, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, pictured in September 1978 when he was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Khalq regime. Behind Amin is a photo of Nur Mohammad Taraki, President of the DRA, whom Amin succeeded as Prime Minister of the Kabul government.*

—Dilip Mehta/Contact.

services it needed to run the country, though trained with great difficulty during 35 years of abortive development, were for the most part either sitting at home or lying in prison. Many of them, as has already been noted, had been supporters of Babrak's *Parcham*.

## The Opposition Takes the Field

Initially, little opposition surfaced to the DRA regime for three distinct reasons. First of all, most people were stunned by the coup. Second, a majority seemed to want to give the new government a chance to suc-

<sup>24</sup> See L. Dupree, "Toward Representative Government in Afghanistan, Parts I and II," loc. cit.



Afghan Islamic forces opposed to the *Khalq* regime gathered in April 1979 in Barkandei, an old district center in Afghanistan's Pich Valley (north of the Khyber Pass between Afghanistan and Pakistan), before returning to their posts in the mountains.

—Alain Mingam-Gamma/Liaison.

ceed. And finally, the spring and summer are seasons of major economic activity in the countryside, and the immediate concerns of farming and herding kept the focus of attention of most of the country's population off Kabul politics. When the agricultural off-season arrived, however, unrest exploded in the rural areas. In Kabul, periodic explosions rocked the city and a plethora of *Shab Namah* ("evening news") reminded the regime that opposition did exist.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Shab Namah* is recognized by all Afghans as a play on words. The great 11th century Persian poet Firdausi wrote a *Shah Namah*, or *History of the Kings*, and the present *Shab Namah* are understood as referring to the "history" or activities of the present "kings," i.e., the *Khalq* regime.

<sup>26</sup> While the Nuristani speak dialects of Indo-Aryan, their dialects and Persian and Pashto are not mutually understandable. The Nuristani are proud of their distinctive mountain culture and were only converted to Islam under duress by Amir Abdur Rahman in the last decade of the 19th century.

<sup>27</sup> See L. Dupree, "Imperialism in South Asia," *AUFS Reports: South Asia Series*, Vol. 20 (3), June 1976; and S. Harrison, "Nightmare in Baluchistan," *Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC), Fall 1978, pp. 136–60.

<sup>28</sup> Estimates of the number of Soviet citizens killed run as high as 50.

The first major uprisings occurred among the culturally distinct Nuristani ethnic group, north of Jalalabad, in eastern Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup> By March 1979, the Nuristani rebels controlled most of the upper Kunar Valley and had actually declared an *Azad* (Free) Nuristan. Here was the first vivid warning that whatever regime rules in Afghanistan in the future, the demands of several ethholinguistic groups for regional autonomy will have to be taken into account. At the very least, the claims of the Nuristani, Hazara, Badakhshi, and Baluchi will have to be realistically considered.<sup>27</sup>

Once the floodgates were opened, revolt—largely spontaneous and uncoordinated—spread to over half of Afghanistan's 28 provinces. Major disturbances occurred in Paktya, Ningrahar, Kapisa, Uruzgan, Parwan, Badghis, Balkh, Ghazni, Farah, and Herat. In Farah, rebels temporarily controlled a major air base at Shindand; and in Herat, rebels killed an undetermined number of Soviet technicians and their wives and children before army units loyal to the *Khalq* regime restored order.<sup>28</sup>

In all, about ten rebel groups have been identified, with political orientations ranging from the secular Left, made up of *Parham* survivors, to the monarchical Right, a group with only a minuscule following. Outside of the Pushtun geographic areas, the most important groups, some of which have been discussed here, are based on ethnolinguistic and regional criteria. Within the Pushtun areas, along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, the three major opposition groups are religiously based. The *Ettehadi-Ingelabi-Islami-wa-Meli Afghanistan* (Islamic Nationalist Revolutionary Party of Afghanistan) is led by Sayyid Ahmad Gailani, an Islamic moderate from a family of well-known religious leaders. The *Jabhai-yi-Nejat-i-Meli* (National Liberation Front) consists of several loosely organized groups and is headed by Hazrat Sebratullah Mojadidi, a member of another leading religious family. Finally, there is the ultraconservative *Hezb-i-Islam* (Islamic Party), small but well organized, under the direction of Engineer Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. This party has been in refuge in Pakistan since Daoud's coup of 1973. Rebel successes in April and May 1979 related directly to semicoordinated efforts by the opposition brought about when Gailani, on April 13, called for a *jihad* against the government.

To meet the challenge posed by widespread opposition, the government intensified its rhetoric and its repression. Regular armed forces units, supported by large numbers of Soviet advisers, were thrown into the fray.

On this basis, some observers have predicted failure for the tribal revolts in non-Pushtun areas. But tanks, planes, and superior technology do not necessarily win nationalist guerrilla wars. Add the religious factor, and resistance can stiffen even more. Still, argue those who see the tribals going down in defeat, the Bolsheviks in Russia were victorious over the autonomy-oriented Central Asian Muslim *basmachi* in the 1920's, and in Afghanistan one sees again a leftist regime at the center trying with Soviet support to quell Muslim unrest. In the opinion of the present author, however, the analogy chosen is not suitable. The Red Army, after all, invaded and crushed the Central Asian local Muslim soviets after the defeat of the White armies, and Bolshevik troops and colonists replaced those of the Tsar, who had been in Central Asia for a generation or so prior to the October Revolution.

Other observers have compared the current situation in Afghanistan to the situation the United States faced in Vietnam, but several significant differences are clear from the outset. The US sent soldiers thousands of miles across the ocean, while the USSR shares a common border with the country in crisis. In

Vietnam, the war was fought by predominantly conscripted American and South Vietnamese troops, on the one hand, and by partly conscript Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army regulars, on the other; in Afghanistan, the fighting so far has been between the overwhelmingly conscript Afghan army and their Soviet advisers, on the one hand, and all-volunteer antigovernment forces (including some Pushtun tribesmen from the Pakistani side of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border), on the other. Finally, although the USSR and China never committed large numbers of combat troops to the Vietnam war, the former and to a lesser extent the latter did render massive aid to North Vietnam and the Viet Cong. There is no evidence to substantiate claims by Kabul and Moscow that outside forces are taking part in the fighting against the *Khalq* regime. If such involvement does exist, it has not been a major factor to date.



Hazrat Sebratullah Mojadidi, leader of Jabhai-yi-Nejat-i-Meli (National Liberation Front), a grouping of organizations in Afghanistan opposed to the *Khalq* regime. Mojadidi is pictured in Peshawar, Pakistan, in early 1979.

—Wide World.

Whether the USSR will follow the American example in Vietnam by sending combat troops into Afghanistan to save the Kabul government is the question of the hour. The Soviets may be tempted to make a quick ground sweep, coupled with massive air strikes, to smash the rebels, and then to withdraw. But such operations seldom had lasting impact in Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia, and Moscow might find itself bogged down in lengthy warfare against an elusive enemy in Afghanistan, no matter what the Soviets' initial intentions. The presence of Soviet combat troops in the country would exacerbate already strained Soviet and Afghan relations with Pakistan and could also heighten great-power tensions in the entire "arc of crisis" stretching along the southern border of the USSR from Turkey in the west eastward to South Asia.

### Tensions With Pakistan

Since the advent of the current regime in Kabul, over 165,000 refugees have flowed across the border from Afghanistan into Pakistan and have settled in about 12 camps, from Gilgit in the northeast to Baluchistan in the southwest. Official figures on the number of refugees are lower but do not take into account refugees living with kinsmen on the Pakistani side of the border. The status and fate of the refugees have, of course, had a direct effect on Afghan-Pakistani relations.

At the highest official levels, relations between the two countries remain cordial, but they are cooling. The President of Pakistan, General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq visited Kabul in September 1978, and his round of talks with DRA leaders resulted in mutual expressions of "good will" and "peaceful feelings" across the border. High-powered Afghan and Pakistani commercial delegations have also exchanged visits, and improved and expanded transit facilities for goods passing through Pakistan to and from Afghanistan have resulted.

Gradually, and increasingly after February 1979, however, Radio Afghanistan has come to charge "prejudiced religious elements" in Iran and "reactionary circles" in Pakistan with aiding guerrilla fighters opposed to the Kabul government. It has accused Pakistan of sending Pakistani troops in disguise to attack Afghan border posts. Pakistan has denied this and issued countercharges of Afghan artillery attacks across the border into Pakistan and violations of Pakistani air space by Afghan military aircraft.

The official Afghan media did not accuse other countries by name of intervention until July 1979,

when they singled out the United States and China in addition to Pakistan, but they have asserted for a long while that the regime is being threatened by "imperialistic, international conservatives and extreme rightists." The Soviet media were more explicit much earlier on. On April 1, 1979, *Pravda* (Moscow) accused Pakistan of providing "logistical and propaganda backing for the Muslim rebels fighting the Marxist government in Kabul," and on April 12 it stated that training camps for Afghan rebels, directed by Pakistanis, Chinese, Americans, and Egyptians, existed in Pakistan. All of the accused nations have denied these charges.

The root of the problem between Afghanistan and Pakistan, of course, is the Durand Line of 1893, which separates the two countries but also divides into separate segments ethnolinguistic groups whose primary loyalties remain largely tribal rather than national. The border has always been a sieve. During the Baluch insurrection of 1973-77, thousands of Baluchi fled from Pakistan to Afghanistan, and guerrillas drifted back and forth across the border with impunity. Afghan nationals can certainly do the same today, no matter how seriously the Pakistanis attempt to stem the flow.

The government of Pakistan considered the refugee problem a provincial-level matter until April 1979. As numbers increased and resources were stretched thin, however, President Zia decided to internationalize the problem, insisting that Pakistan had no choice but to admit the refugees "on humanitarian grounds." Zia suggested that conditions be created in Afghanistan so the refugees could return home, but he refrained from offering specific suggestions as to how such conditions should be established. In mid-May 1979, two representatives from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees arrived in Pakistan to discuss the problem with Zia's government, but as of this writing little has been done to improve the situation. Meanwhile, tensions have remained high between Kabul and Islamabad, and the longer these tensions persist, the greater the chance of direct great-power intervention and confrontation in the area.

### The Role of the Great Powers

Despite numerous allegations to the contrary, the Soviets were not, in this author's estimation, directly involved in the "planning" of the "accidental coup" of April 27, 1978. Soviet military personnel may have played an advisory role during the fighting which fol-

lowed the start of the coup, but if so, they were probably as surprised as everyone else at the rapid flip-flop of events.

Nor is the Taraki-Amin regime directly controlled by Moscow, although the Afghan leadership does associate itself with the "international socialist movement." Influence is one thing; domination, another. And the gray zones of power in between are always up for grabs. The regime in Kabul is Marxist and Communist, but these terms are used here only to refer to international socioeconomic and political orientation.

The Soviets have—logically—tried to take advantage of the results of the coup, which dumped an obviously Moscow-leaning government into their laps, ready or not. The Kremlin would like all observers to assume that it is in control in Kabul so that it can observe the effect such a situation would have on Pakistan, India, Iran, the United States, China, and the Arab world. In addition, the Soviet leadership may

reason that outside intervention is less likely in the face of a Soviet *fait accompli*—and it may be right. But this does not alter the fact that in reality no *fait accompli* exists.

For its part, the *Khalq* leadership assumes that Afghanistan will receive unlimited and unqualified Soviet support. On May 13, 1979, Radio Afghanistan quoted Prime Minister Amin as saying: "We also have our friends who are supporting us. They are giving us whatever we want. Whichever arms we demand, they will supply us." But what is the basis of the self-assurance of such statements? It is true that the USSR was the first state to recognize the DRA, but it had also been the first to recognize the Daoud regime in 1973. It is true that within a month of the coup the Soviets signed more than 30 aid agreements with the DRA, but most of these had been initiated during the Daoud period. And it is true that large numbers of Soviet technicians and their families swarmed into the



Oleg Shaidyuk, a Soviet expert from Kiev, consults in May 1979 with workers of a plant for the manufacture of prefab construction components built with Soviet aid in Kabul, Afghanistan.

—TASS from Sovfoto.



*Anti-Khalq Islamic guerrillas of the Nuristan region of northeast Afghanistan pose on a downed Soviet-made helicopter that had been in the service of regular forces of the Kabul regime and was downed in March 1979.*

—Wildenberg-Sipa/Black Star

country after April 1978, but they had after the Daoud coup as well.

The reality is that the DRA regime acts in ways it *assumes* the USSR wants it to act because it *assumes* the USSR will never abandon it. Thus, the current situation seems based on a lot of assumptions. But of course, foreign policy is often based on assumptions and prejudices. The real crunch will come when—and if—the Taraki-Amin regime must admit that it cannot control the Afghan countryside and that the mainly conscripted army<sup>29</sup> now doing its fighting cannot be depended on. Already, many Afghan troops have de-

serted with their weapons and ammunition and joined the anti-government guerrillas.<sup>30</sup> In such circumstances, would the Soviet Union, which has already committed large amounts of military matériel to the country, intercede with Soviet combat troops?

Whatever happens, it is already clear that Pakistan now feels more threatened from the north than ever before, while Iran, trying to establish stability through anarchy, must continually look over its shoulder at events to the east. India, in spite of its treaty relationships with the USSR, is more worried privately than it admits publicly. And the demise of any Islamic-flavored regime, such as all those in Afghanistan prior to the coup, is always of concern to the Arab states. The United States (and its allies) would, as the official note addressed to the Soviet Union on March 23, 1979, stated, "regard external involvement in Afghanistan's internal problems as a serious matter with

<sup>29</sup> There are only a few specialized volunteer combat and air force units with nonconscripted status.

<sup>30</sup> As the rebels move toward Kabul, what I call the accumulated guerrilla effect (AGE) may set in. Tribesmen, villagers, and military units along their routes of advance may join their assault against the government.

a potential for heightening tensions and destabilizing the situation in the entire region."<sup>31</sup>

The USSR replied in kind to the US note, warning in *Pravda* of dire (but unspecified) consequences if Pakistan, aided by the Iranians, Americans, Chinese, and Egyptians continued to assist Muslim rebels inside Afghanistan.<sup>32</sup> But if the Soviets physically occupied Afghanistan to save Taraki and Amin, what would they gain? They would have outflanked Iran, of course, and would be nearer, though not on, the Arabian Sea. This is something which might have pleased Peter the Great. Given the current situation in the area, however, what would the Soviets actually gain from such an advance? They would not in fact be at water's edge. Moreover, they already have naval access through the Dardanelles into the Mediterranean Sea, thence through the Suez Canal to the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. A Soviet naval squadron of about 25 vessels, including an aircraft carrier, operates constantly in the region, partly in response to the presence of US air and naval facilities at Diego Garcia. (Or is it vice versa? The United States maintains a flotilla of only about ten ships in the region, also including an aircraft carrier.) The Soviets already have access to port and naval facilities for their ships in East Africa and in South Yemen, at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Finally, their Pacific Fleet can presumably move additional task forces into Indian Ocean waters when needed with as much ease as the United States navy. With the "warm water war" already heated, would the Soviets like to fan the flames still higher?

More important than the naval perspective on this problem, in my view, is the fact that if the Kremlin does intervene directly, Afghanistan will be the first piece of new real estate physically occupied by Soviet troops since World War II. This would set a significant and potentially dangerous precedent. Moscow has signed loosely structured treaties of friendship with a wide scattering of developing countries over the last few years—including Angola, Mozambique, Iraq, India, Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan—but the operative clauses of the treaties have seldom bound the USSR to specific courses of action. Similar treaties were the source of considerable trouble for the United States in the 1960's and early 1970's, and the Soviets, if they have studied history well, might just decline to become the "world's policeman" of the 1980's. If so, they will likely not expand the meaning of these

treaties and will feel less bound to aid the regime in Kabul. In short, events may be allowed to take their course without outside interference.

Another factor which might restrain the Soviet Union would be the impact a military occupation of Afghanistan would have on Moscow's relations with the Third World, and particularly Muslim countries. Moreover, the Muslim populations of the Soviet Central Asian republics themselves might object to being involved in the occupation of a brother Muslim land. The Russians will have to face a growing Islamic revival in Central Asia in coming years, as well as the problems created by rapidly increasing non-Russian populations in the national republics of the USSR.<sup>33</sup> With these prospects already looming on the horizon, they might choose to avoid any course of action likely to exacerbate anti-Russian feelings beyond present levels.

One can ask how the Soviets could justify their inaction to other socialist countries if they refuse to respond to (or ignore) a request to intervene to salvage the *Khalq* regime. An obvious answer might be to point out that the Soviet-Afghan Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in Moscow on December 5, 1978, merely called for consultations between the two countries on major issues concerning them both—nothing less, but nothing more. Beyond this, Pakistan continues to officially deny allegations that it has interfered in Afghanistan, and claims to be trying to prevent refugees from becoming guerrillas (something obviously beyond its capabilities). The Kremlin can choose to accept this. After all, accusations in *Pravda* are one thing; active military intervention is another.

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### Likely Outcomes

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One question remains to be answered. What will be the outcome of the current strife in Afghanistan?

If the anti-*Khalq* forces receive no large-scale outside assistance, will they manage to overthrow the regime? The answer lies in the response to a question which must be asked no matter how much one respects—or supports—the proposed socioeconomic and political reforms of the DRA regime. Is Afghanistan ready for the drastic overhaul Amin and Taraki propose? Afghan history and cultural patterns say no, and the answer will probably remain no unless the Soviets decide to intervene. Without external interference, the victor will be the side which wins the hearts

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<sup>31</sup> See David Binder, "US Cautions Moscow to Avoid Any Military Role in Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, March 23, 1979.

<sup>32</sup> *Pravda* (Moscow), April 10, 1979.

<sup>33</sup> See Héliane Carrère d'Encausse, *L'Empire éclaté* (The Exploded Empire), Paris, Flammarion, 1978.



and minds of the people, notwithstanding the superior firepower and Soviet-supplied tanks and planes of the *Khalq* regime.

In light of the analysis presented in the main body of this article, the Soviets probably stand to lose more than they stand to gain by occupying Afghanistan on behalf of this or any other regime—and one suspects that their better judgment may already be telling them this. As has been so in the past, any future government in Kabul will have to maintain a “special relationship” with Moscow which will preclude Afghanistan from opposing the Soviet Union on the international scene except on the rarest of occasions.<sup>34</sup> According to this schema, Afghanistan seems well-suited for the role of a *nonaligned satellite*, which is a perfectly legitimate stance for a developing country in close proximity to a great power. The Afghans could maintain their flexibility in trade and aid relations, their cultural identities and traditions, and their internal political independence.

It was perhaps recognition of the ultimate forcefulness of this outcome which determined the sensible wait-and-see attitude of the United States after the April coup. The US mixed watchful waiting with business as usual until February 14, 1979, when four armed terrorists, apparently from the ultra-left *Setem-i-Meli*, seized the American ambassador in Kabul, Adolph Dubs. The kidnappers held Dubs hostage in a room in the Kabul Hotel in the hope of obtaining the release of four recently arrested comrades. Afghan authorities ignored repeated requests from the US government that no action be taken which might endanger the ambassador's life. And Afghan police, presumably under the orders of the then Commandant of Security Forces, Colonel Daoud Taroon, assaulted the room where two of the terrorists held Dubs at gunpoint. The terrorists and the ambassador died in the assault.

Since this tragic incident, the US Embassy in Kabul has been unable to ascertain with certainty the identity of the terrorists. Nor has the US received a satisfactory answer from Kabul regarding the role in the assault of several Soviet advisers observed consulting with the Afghan police at the time of the attack. The death of Ambassador Dubs probably resulted from the combination of Soviet attitudes toward hijackers (no negotiations) and the Afghan love of immediate action

regardless of the consequences. In any event, American programs in Afghanistan have been winding down since February, and apparently when everything already “in the pipeline” is finished, US aid to the country will end. In late July, some 100 US Embassy employees and dependents were evacuated from the country, leaving behind a staff of just 48 people. This may not be what the US wanted, and it is unlikely to help the Afghans, whichever side of the current battle they are on. But what else could the US do?

Those who know Kabul well report that fear permeates the scene. Political prisoners are apparently being executed daily, and rebel forces seem to control more and more of the countryside every day. Fear even pervades the atmosphere at the demonstrations staged daily in Kabul in support of the government and at sites of “voluntary labor” for the public good, both of which have greatly affected normal work schedules in the capital. Kabul has seldom had a free press, but before the coup “freedom of the mouth” was a time-honored tradition, an urban manifestation of the open debates of the village *jirgah* (council). In private homes and in tea houses, Afghans argued politics incessantly. Now, not at all.

Afghan prisons are overflowing with an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 prisoners—though one tenth of such figures may be more realistic. The *Khalq* regime did not invent imprisonment and torture as political weapons, but it has gone far beyond previous limits in its treatment of the opposition, especially the intellectuals. Look, for instance, at the current power elite. Many of them spent time in Mohammad Daoud's jails; yet they live and are in power. In contrast, Daoud, who was certainly no saint but was a great man in modern Afghan history, and most of his family lie in unmarked graves.

Without stability in the countryside, even the most admirable reforms cannot be implemented. And in this case, there is considerable doubt that the reforms the *Khalq* regime wants would be viable in the Afghan setting. It has often been said that those who ignore the past have no future, and even a high-ranking Soviet official in Moscow has said, “If there is one country in the developing world we would like *not* to try scientific socialism at this point in time, it is Afghanistan.” The DRA's thrust toward socialism may advance this battered country a ministeap along the path. But even if the Russians occupy Afghanistan to save the *Khalq* regime, Afghan historical and cultural patterns, probably altered but still clearly recognizable as Afghan, will ultimately emerge victorious.

<sup>34</sup> Many less vulnerable Third World regimes already position themselves very close to the USSR on major international issues. There is no reason why Afghanistan could not be expected to do the same.

