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THE FALL OF THE AFGHAN MONARCHY IN 1973

Afghanistan proceeded along the road of constitutional monarchy for a decade from 1963 to 1973 in the reign of King Muhammad Zahir (1933-1973) much as it had during the reign of King Aman Allah (1919-1929). In the 1950s, parliamentary democracy was also practiced for a brief period. But these experiments failed, and the reigning monarchs were forced into exile in Italy. In 1973, Afghanistan was proclaimed a republic. This article examines why, in the last period, the constitutional system of government, as well as the well-established Afghan monarchy, collapsed.

Afghanistan had been a monarchy since the middle of the eighteenth century. But until 1880 it was, in the words of a nineteenth-century French traveler, 'rather a military, aristocratic, and despotic republic, the dictator of which [was] established for life'. In other words, the principle of political succession was not effectively in operation. In addition, the ruler had to seek the counsel of aristocratic sardars and tribal elders in a loose system of government. The monarchy, in the sense of rule by one man, began with Amir 'Abd al-Rahman (1880-1901), who reduced the council of elders to a mere rubber stamp and legitimized his reign by claiming a divine right to rule. With the help of the ulama, he formulated a theoretical foundation for the monarchy at the same time that he spread the power of the central government over the country through a centrally controlled bureaucracy, backed by a strong standing army. Following his reign, two trends marked the political history of Afghanistan: a constitutional movement and a republican movement. Neither of these movements enjoyed an unbroken line of existence, and their emergence was parallel to the introduction into the country of various degrees of modernization during the reigns of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman's immediate successors, Amir Hibib Allah (1901-1919) and King Aman Allah (1919-1929). During the reigns of these monarchs, assertive modernizing factions appeared in Kabul. These consisted of court officials, ghulam bachelors (page boys), bureaucrats, graduates of modern high schools, writers, resident provincial khans, and others who were influenced by the

Author's note: I wish to thank the senior members of the governments of the constitutional period and others who have enlightened me on a number of topics discussed in this paper.

Russian, Persian, and Turkish revolutions of 1905, 1906, and 1908, respectively.

The republican movement was the weaker of the two. This was true in spite of the fact that republican sentiments were shared by a great number of the ulama, inasmuch as they were basically consistent with the egalitarian nature of Afghan society. References to the republican movement and to those who advocated it are scanty in literature, and the movement has not hitherto been discussed. We first hear about the movement in the reign of King Amán Allāh when a secret association, the Veiled Party (Hīzb-i-Nīqābdār), worked for the downfall of that monarch. Not much is known of the identity of its members except that they arose from among the intelligentsia (roshanfikrān). In the last phase of the same monarch's reign, the traditionalists, as a last resort, stood for a republic in a bid to oust the king whose reforming programs they considered heretical. Their view of the republic was not based on a secular model, however, but on that of an Islamic caliphate designed for the consolidation of Islam. Their opposition had a great deal to do with the downfall of King Amán Allāh in 1929, and the resurgence of Islamic sentiments in the brief reign of his successor, Amīr Ijabīb Allāh (January–October 1929), whose government at the height of his power has been described as reasonably efficient, with a distinct republican flavor.

In this period, even 'Abd al-Raḥim, the viceroy of the province of Herat, while denouncing the 'absolute monarchy', established 'a republican form of government, by which the administration of the Province was placed in the hands of a Committee of fifty, consisting of religious leaders, officials, and prominent citizens'. But those who advocated republicanism along secular lines were to be found among modernistic elements. The best known among them was Muḥammad Wālī Badakhshānī, who had served King Amán Allāh as a minister of war and was in 1932 executed on 'a charge of plotting to establish a republic'.

After the assassination of King Nādīr in 1933, the regime became especially repressive, and the republican movement appeared to be without life. But by the outbreak of World War II the movement had developed to the point that in British sources it was referred to as 'The Republican Party', consisting 'mainly of malcontents within and without the Government, of merchants discontented with the Government economic policy, and of personal opponents to the Ruling House'. The party was believed to be led by three able and ambitious men,

3 Ghobar, Afghanistan along the Highway, p. 804.
4 Adamec, Afghanistan's Foreign Affairs, p. 163.
although it is not clear who these men were. They were probably senior military officers, who had acquired training in Turkey and had been inspired by Atatürk and his model of the republic. Indeed, among these officials, Muḥammad Gul Mohmand, who had done invaluable service to the new dynasty in establishing and consolidating it, was 'commonly supposed to be the leader of a revolutionary party aiming at the establishment of an Afghan republic'. During the short reign of King Nādir (1929-1933), Muḥammad Gul Mohmand was the most influential man in the country, outside the immediate royal circle. He subsequently lost favor with the government of Premier Sardār Muḥammad Ḥāshim Khān. Aware of his intentions, the government watched him closely in Kabul during the summer of 1939, when a rebellion was in progress in Katakaw, and the government feared a coup d'état by the Republican Party. But the outbreak of war and the fear of a Russian invasion of Afghanistan convinced the leaders of the party that 'this was not the time to attempt to divide the country against itself'. Unfortunately, postwar archival sources in London are not open to the public and it is not possible to trace the movement further. But there can be no doubt that in 1947 the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and in 1950 the brief flight to Rome of the Shāh of Iran, spurred republican elements in Kabul. In an effort to dissuade the Afghan government from advancing the cause of Pashtūnistan, the government of Pakistan, in its little-known radio war with Afghanistan, concentrated on the merits of an Islamic republican system and the demerits of the monarchy. This profoundly, if slowly, influenced the Afghan public. The result was that for twenty-five years, almost all Afghan modernists were republican at heart. For tactical reasons, however, they stood for a constitutional monarchy.

I have discussed the Afghan constitutional movement up to the 1950s in detail elsewhere. Briefly, during Amir Ḥābib Allāh’s reign, a number of secret political associations holding moderate to extreme views came into existence. In 1909, the National Secret Association (Jam‘iyyat-i-Sirī-i-Milli) was accused of planning to overthrow the monarchy and was suppressed. Thereafter, the center of opposition to the absolute power of the king shifted to the court. Some members of the court, including the king’s son and brother, joined the reformist elements for various reasons and, in 1919, the king was assassinated. The assassination in all probability was instigated by the princes and some courtiers. In 1923, during the reign of King Amān Allāh, Afghanistan acquired a written constitution and various other new laws, to the great satisfaction of the modernists. Afghanistan also became fully independent (since 1880 its foreign relations had been conducted through the British, but internally it had been completely free), and soon entered into diplomatic, commercial, educational, and developmental agreements with foreign countries. At home, the radical new king

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9 Afghanistan, Annual Reports, 1939-1947, Political (External) Dept. L/P and S/12/1572, Coll. 3/21, 2, P.S. IOL.
embarked on a comprehensive scheme of modernization to transform almost overnight the basically conservative society into a modern one. Some of the reforms were unrealistic and unnecessary. Soon the society was sharply divided between the forces of conservatism and those of change. Traditional elements (tribal and religious leaders including the Muḥammadzay sardārs) and even the soldiers stirred the masses to action. The king and the relatively small group of modernists were helpless against them and the monarchy fell. The downfall of this quasi-constitutional monarchy was a severe blow to the constitutionalists for the new dynasty, concerned with the establishment of its rule, crushed them into impotence. The country was run with an iron fist through a family oligarchy, even though Afghanistan was formally declared a constitutional monarchy in 1931. As time went on, however, the sequence of events became similar to that which followed the repression of 1909. Within the top dynastic circle, a division appeared, apparently along generational lines. The younger members of the dynasty, led by King Ṭāhir and his two peer cousins, Sardār Muhammad Dāūd and Sardār Muhammad Naʿīm, and the majority of the small intelligentsia who had received higher education abroad and at home, began to play a vital role. Dissatisfied with the slow pace of progress, these three men emerged in 1953 as the leaders of the country, with Sardār Muḥammad Dāūd head of the government for the next decade (1953–1963). An admirer of former King Amān Allah, Muḥammad Dāūd embarked on reforms. He began to build up the army and the country’s infrastructure, largely with Soviet help, as discussed below. But the system of government remained as rigid as before.

Nevertheless, by the end of the decade under Dāūd’s rule, the socioeconomic reforms and especially the expansion of education, led to the emergence of an assertive middle class. They were no longer content with the rule of the aristocratic Muḥammadzays, most of whom had adopted superficial elements of Western life-styles and had alienated themselves from their own countrymen. Sensing the situation, Premier Dāūd in 1962, intended to introduce political reforms. In a series of letters to the king he outlined his views, arguing that since the intelligentsia (tabaq-a-i munawwar) desired change and various kinds of ideologies were secretly active, the present system of government was no longer viable. In his view, the royal house had grown too large. Its members, while looking on their special privileges as their ‘positive and natural right’, treated the existing laws as mere scraps of paper. This situation, he held, was bound to create tensions harmful to the monarchy. He reminded the king that in the past intrigues and struggles among ambitious courtiers, members of ‘the influential classes’, and the government had led to the ruination of the country. These

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13 Fraser-Tytler (Kabul), to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 15 Jan. 1940, Political (External) Dept. Coll. 3/211, Review of Political Tendencies in Afghanistan in 1939, p. 3, IOL.
might now be repeated. As a first alternative, Premier Da'ud proposed 'a public referendum' on the future system of government, but this he considered impracticable. He then elaborated the second alternative: the granting of a new constitution based on a constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy, and the legalization of either one or two political parties. The king was merely to play the role of head of state, without interfering in state affairs. The government (the executive) formed by the majority party in Parliament was to be alone responsible for overall state policies. The judiciary was to function independently. 14

This was a time when the government was financially bankrupt (it had exhausted its financial resources on developmental projects), and the closure of the border with Pakistan over the problem of Pashtunistan had still further increased Afghanistan's dependence on the Soviet-bloc countries. In addition, a number of coups d'état had occurred in the Middle Eastern countries. All this had also helped convince the king of the necessity of introducing political reforms. But he was suspicious of Premier Da'ud, feeling that he had already become too autocratic and that the proposed constitution would perpetuate his de facto rule. 15 The king showed reluctance to study the proposals, until Premier Da'ud, forty-seven days after submitting them, also submitted his resignation. The king promptly accepted Da'ud's resignation, and then embarked on political reforms that constitutionally strengthened his own position. In the new constitution which came into effect in 1964, members of the royal house (including Muhammad Da'ud and Muhammad Na'im, now princes) were debarred from taking part in national politics. This part-liberal, part-parliamentary, and part-democratic constitution, which set Afghanistan on the road to a part-constitutional monarchy, has been dealt with in detail by Louis Dupree and others. 16 But Dupree has not discussed the cardinal point, namely the relationship of the king's power to that of the executive and legislative. In granting the constitution, the king hoped that he would solidify the monarchy by attaching to it the increasingly assertive and disgruntled members of the upper middle class as well as the traditional elders of the rural areas. Instead, the political opportunities it provided for all hastened its downfall.

The rift between the peer cousins had much to do with the downfall of the monarchy, but it became really significant only when discontent in the society reached a high pitch. Ever since his accession in 1933, King Zahir had been overshadowed by his powerful uncles and cousins. Within the top dynastic circle, he was only nominally a king. He was left to his pleasures, which damaged his moral image, in spite of his scholarly personality. By 1962, however, he had

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solidified his position by building up a strong faction inside the dynastic circle, by making frequent trips throughout the country and, above all, by establishing control over the army (although whether the army was more loyal to the king or to Premier Dā‘ūd is not known). Yet when the king was ready to exercise overall power, he found himself outshone by the dynamism and integrity of Dā‘ūd, who now, conversely, intended that the king should relinquish power and consent to reign only as a figurehead. A clash seemed imminent and it is a tribute to Dā‘ūd that he avoided it by stepping down quietly.

In the constitutional period, a broad coalition of educated liberals formed the government. But the king emerged as the sole central figure for the first time in his reign despite the constitution, a situation that hindered the growth of a strong executive vis-à-vis the monarch and the Ulusi Jirga (the lower house of the national assembly). Before the promulgation of the constitution, the king had removed incumbent premiers by devising schemes against them. He resorted to similar methods during the constitutional period. Prime ministers and ministers known for their dynamism and determination to push the country along the road to parliamentary democracy were soon frustrated, owing partly to the lack of royal support, the only basis of their power. Only toward the end did the king come around to the view of strengthening the executive, delegating some degree of authority to the last prime minister. Even so, the king's style of rule remained basically the same: to seek advice from foreigners and to give instructions to his ministers, treating them as individual officials rather than as members of a collective team. Except for a few cabinet members who were bold enough to initiate policies of their own in their departments, the bulk of the cabinet looked for implicit or explicit royal instructions. On the whole, the executives of the constitutional period functioned dependently, being closely associated with the monarch. It was natural, then, that resentment against the one was necessarily directed against the other.

The Afghan bureaucracy is generally inefficient and corrupt; during the constitutional period it became more so. Afghan civil servants are probably among the lowest paid in the world. It is impossible for them to live decently on their salaries unless they are supplemented by other sources of income. Corruption and embezzlement are accepted facts of Afghan bureaucratic life and are objected to only when excesses are committed. An observer has classified the civil servants of this period into three groups: (1) those who are honest, but take no responsibility and do nothing for fear of losing their good names; (2) those who will go to any extreme when they see that they may personally benefit from it; (3) more numerous than the others, the junior bureaucrats, who are undernourished, poor, overburdened with personal worries, incompetent, and incapable of doing their jobs. In 1969, a new law decreed that officials were subject to punishment and dismissal only by order of the courts, not by senior officials, as was the practice in the past. No doubt this, and the fact that government officials are employed on a permanent basis, gave them a high degree of security, but at the same time it made the bureaucracy still more inefficient.
In Kabul, some officials merely signed attendance books and spent their working days walking along the streets. It became next to impossible to make innovations in the bureaucracy. Even the ordinary functions of the state were not carried through, and influential men, whether within or outside government circles, openly began to promote their selfish interests at the expense of the state. This, among other things, proved most damaging financially to the state since huge sums owed to the state (customs duties and income taxes, in particular) fell in arrears, and smuggling increased in volume.

In the absence of an adequate electoral bill to regulate election campaigns, the Ulusi Jirga was dominated by those who could afford to spend large sums of money in parliamentary campaigns. Campaign expenses for each candidate ranged from 100,000 to 2,000,000 afghanis with some candidates actually buying votes for cash. These are huge sums for such a purpose in a country where the average salary of a university professor is 3,500 afghanis (US $82) per month. Except for candidates of the political parties (though not legal, political parties were active during the constitutional period) and a few others, the bulk of the candidates (some were illiterate) spent the money out of their own pockets. This barred members of the educated middle class from entering Parliament. Hence, the Ulusi Jirga was dominated by former bureaucrats and local magnates who were concerned mainly with recovering their lost money, rather than deliberating over problems of the country. A situation was created in which the backward-looking traditional elements of the old order, rather than the forward-looking elements of the middle class, came into the forefront of national politics. Parliamentary life fell to those who did not really understand it. Most often, the Jirga lacked a quorum, because many of the members either stormed government departments for personal matters or did not take interest in parliamentary affairs. This situation made cooperation between governments and the Jirga difficult, if not impossible, despite the expectation that the new arrangements would forge an alliance between the two against the rising radical elements. Nevertheless, it is to the credit of Parliament that it passed a few fundamental bills, mentioned below.

On top of all this, as Louis Dupree points out, the constitutional period lacked involvement. This became apparent when the king, advised by his intimate family circle, failed to promulgate the Political Parties Law, the Provincial Councils Law, and the Municipal Councils Act, all passed by Parliament. Consequently, the talented and scrupulous members of the intelligentsia whom Dupree calls 'the comfortable stagnates of the growing urban middle class', remained outside the mainstream of politics. Governments were usually on bad terms with the Ulusi Jirga, in opposition to political parties, and deprived of overall support of the middle class; they became, in effect, caretakers and failed to function effectively. This situation would not have been especially significant had there not been rising expectations in the country. But the governments of this period were caught up between strong, conflicting pressures.

17 Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 753.
During the constitutional period, political consciousness was remarkably pronounced throughout the country. This was partly the result of great improvement in the system of communication and transportation which significantly reduced the relative isolation of regional communities. No longer was national politics pursued effectively in terms of region, religion, tribe, or kinship affinity. The various modern types of political ideologies and alignments transcended these traditional lines. A nongovernmental free press flourished, in spite of the limited number of printing presses, financial stringency, and the temporary or permanent suspension by the government of radical weeklies. The government-controlled press, which was the only source of information before the constitutional period, totally receded. All this became possible during a period when the Afghans enjoyed new political freedom.

In this respect, the Afghan people became more advanced than their neighbors. Afghanistan was no longer a police state with an extensive network of intelligence service attached to it, although court-controlled intelligence services remained as active as before. All of a sudden, the Afghans found that their government, after about a century of extreme rigidity, had turned soft. Gone were the days when individuals were suddenly imprisoned or exiled without an order of the court and their property confiscated. Also, gone were the days when peasants and farmers trembled at the appearance in their villages of tax collectors and their police escorts.

But the liberalization of state and society brought about some new problems and intensified old ones, all of which produced tensions of a new kind. To the surprise of many, thugs and criminals of Western type appeared in the cities, and policemen were hardly qualified to cope with this new phenomenon. Furthermore, the recently emancipated women found it difficult to move about as freely as before, a serious problem since women had always been a major source of bloodshed in Afghanistan. But far more serious and with wider implications was the confrontation between the forces of tradition and modernism, similar to that in the reign of King Aman Allah. Religious leaders, who looked upon themselves as custodians of the Islamic ideals, felt strongly that atheistic views and elements had penetrated their society and that they were duty bound to combat them.

In modern Afghanistan, modernizing efforts had always been opposed by religious leaders (mullahs), especially the Hadrats (also called Mujadidis). The latter, as followers of the Naqshbandi order, had been most vocal and organized in their opposition. Although recent comers to Afghanistan (they came from Sirhind in India in the 1870s to escape from infidel rule), the Hadrats, in the tradition of the Naqshbandi order, have striven to influence the royal court and national politics. Their opposition to King Aman Allah's reforms contributed significantly to that monarch's downfall. Following the downfall of King Aman Allah, the Hadrats in particular and the forces of tradition and conservatism in general went unchallenged for more than two decades. But the enlightened rulers and the intelligentsia resented the Hadrat's influence over the common Afghans. This might explain why the hold of the Hadrats -- indeed of all religious leaders--
over events gradually weakened. The conservatives were challenged in the short period of experimental democracy in the 1950s when the Hadrats once again began to strike. This time their target was Ghulam Hasan Safay, a leader of a political party, who had publicly criticized the illegal use of construction materials designated for a school in a building designed for the protection of the alleged hair of the Prophet Muhammad. But the Hadrats failed to harm the accused who, accused only of blasphemy, was imprisoned by a special court order. This failure was the result of a broad coalition of all political groups against the Hadrats, who were looked upon as the principal representatives of the opposition to progress, modernism, and nationalism. In the constitutional period, the Hadrats once again intensified their activities when the forces of modernism began to attack the traditional values of Afghan society. In tune with the times, and along the model of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Pakistan's Jam'iyat al-Ulama, the educated urban elements of the Afghan religious groups formed two factions. The more significant was the one commonly known as the Ikhwān-i-Jahān, who were, more or less, under the Hadrats' influence. They had a more modern outlook and concentrated on urban centers, especially the government-controlled schools and religious colleges. But to the surprise of many, their strength on the campus of Kabul University was relatively poor. The call of some for an 'armed jihad' fell on deaf ears. On the ideological front, the weekly Gahīez became the sharpest mouthpiece of the religious conservatives until its editor, Gahīez, was mysteriously murdered in 1972.

Outside the campus, young religious fanatics chose emancipated women for their targets, throwing acid on them. Two hundred women were hospitalized with painful burns. One fanatic seriously and indiscriminately wounded women on the streets before he was apprehended. In some rural areas, bands of young mullās roamed about unchecked, harassing women who traditionally went to shrines and held festivities on certain occasions. But unlike the situation in the 1920s, when a similar issue concerning women had contributed to the halt of reforms, or as recently as 1959 when a riot took place in Kandahar against the unveiling of women, now public sympathy was on the side of the victims. Indeed, in the relaxed atmosphere of the constitutional period, the educated women of Kabul themselves had become a political force, mainly through the organizing efforts of Dr. Naheed Anahitā, the leader of a leftist party she organized, called the Democratic Movement of Women. For the first time in Afghanistan, more than five thousand women took to the streets and demanded punishment for the attackers, who were subsequently tried and given long prison terms.

The situation in the country became even more excited and dangerous when religious elements rose first against the leftists and then voiced opposition to the socioeducational aspects of the reforms. This happened in April 1971, after a leftist poet hailed Lenin with the word dorūd – a general Dari word for praise but customarily reserved for the Prophet Muhammad. Actually the poem was objectionable for promoting a cult of individualism of a new brand in a time of iconoclasm, but the word dorūd gave the needed ammunition to the angry mullās,
Hadrats, and all those who were opposed to the leftists. It was said, though not established, that the government at the time also incited the mullās. Whatever the truth, for about two weeks the mullās of Kabul and of the nearby provinces took to the streets in the biggest demonstration in the modern style ever held in Afghanistan. Initially, the mullās demanded that the government take measures against communism in Afghanistan, and imprison the poet. As time went on and many mullās from the distant rural areas joined the processions, their demands became multidimensional, including a full range of antimodernist points: banning of alcohol, compulsory return of the chadarī (veil), punishment of women wearing the miniskirt, abolition of secular education, and total acceptance of religious instead of secular laws. It was a clear example of how a movement took a course different from that originally intended. Now the mullās also attacked the government for its alleged failure to follow the tenets of Islam and for not dealing with corruption and injustice. The more zealous among them even dropped the name of the king from the Friday khatāba, an action tantamount to rebellion. It was then that the government lost patience, and ordered the army to expel the mullās from the city. Early one morning, the mullās were pushed into trucks and carried to the provinces. It was a bizarre scene; any white-turbaned man who happened to be in a mosque met this fate. For many days, no one resembling a mulla was allowed entry to Kabul. The expulsion was, in some ways, reminiscent of the ‘white-turbaned massacre’ of about two centuries ago (1789) when the Pashtūns of the Khybar area were massacred after they unsuccessfully besieged Timur Shāh Sadozay in the fort of Peshāwar.

In the constitutional period, the mullās failed to stir the populace to action against either the leftists or the government. The only revolt came when two of the four major sections of the turbulent Shinwārī tribe of the Khybar area – the Sepai and Mandozay – rose during late May and early June, 1971. They bore a grudge against the government over land recently brought under cultivation near the provincial city of Jalalabad. It was a small uprising in support of the mullās, but the government took it seriously and quickly suppressed it lest it became a model for other tribes – as a similar one had in 1928, which significantly contributed to the downfall of King Amān Allāh. The failure of the revolt clearly demonstrated that traditional elements of opposition were no longer a match for the government.

In describing forces of modernism in the constitutional period, we should first note that they were dominated by urban groups but that most of them still had connections with the rural communities. The exclusively urban elements were small. These urban groups, originally from the rural communities, had undergone changes in life-styles, the result of modern education and modern professions. A significant number of the rural elements from among the landowners and bureaucrats had also become urbanite, without having lost connection with their original communities. Through these links, it was relatively easy for

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the sophisticated urban elements to establish bridges of communication with the rural masses in spite of the high percentage of illiteracy among them (about 90 per cent).

Afghanistan is, of course, still predominantly an agrarian society. Its egalitarianism, the result of its peculiar socioeconomic structure, makes it distinct from hierarchically stratified societies such as that of India or even Iran. This situation in Afghanistan has left the masses open to penetration. It has been argued, with some justification, that because of the egalitarian nature of Afghan society, the individualism that goes with it, and the fact that ‘Islam is the faith of a fiercely independent group of individuals [Pashtūns]’, communism can make no headway in Afghanistan. Further, it is argued that ‘it is this individualism that is likely to provide the antithesis to communism rather than religious doctrine as such’. But there is a dichotomy of a different kind that reinforces the opposite view. In Afghanistan, ever since the penetration of the central government into the rural areas, the gap between the masses and the state has become greater. As representatives of the state in the rural areas, government officials (tax assessors, tax collectors, mīrzās [junior bureaucrats], district and provincial governors, even the police and gendarmerie) have openly and ruthlessly squeezed the poor peasants, often in collaboration with village and community elders (maliks, khāns, arbāb, mīrs, ʿaqāqāls, and kadkhudās). This is not to suggest that all government officials are corrupt. One can sometimes find God-fearing, incorruptible men among them, especially among the judges. But the hard fact is that it is impossible for officials to live decently on the salaries they receive, which must be shared with their superiors, especially on their appointment. The officials are often appointed by the central government in Kabul to areas far from their own. They are not checked by social restraints as village elders are, but rather by loose government regulations which they can twist to their own advantage. These officials are notorious for their skill in entrapping the illiterate peasants, who fear them the most. Whenever they have anything to do with the local government, their first approach is to bribe the officials through village elders. In modern Afghanistan, the abuse of authority by these officials has been a major source of revolt. Indeed, ever since the extension of the direct control of the central government in the country as a whole in the last two decades of the last century the abuse of authority by these officials has given a new dimension to the history of Afghanistan.

Revolts of peasants against landlords are exceptions to the rule. Revolts of both, often joined by religious leaders, against the state are the norm. The often-cited cleavage between landlords and peasants is not significant in Afghanistan for three reasons. First, the greater part of the land is owned by small proprietors, most of whom cultivate their own land. Second, landless peasants cultivating the land of others receive a significant share of the crop. Most of them become well off when they find enough irrigated land to cultivate. Then they engage themselves in usury and trade. Third, the trend toward concentration

of landownership into fewer hands has not been great, and except for some areas the pauperization of peasants is not visible in Afghanistan. This is not to suggest that all peasants are well off. Indeed, they are poor, but as one recent observer has put it, 'it is rare in Afghanistan to come across any stark display of the depths of poverty which are so harrowing in more densely populated, if richer, underdeveloped countries'. This is because, according to the same observer, 'The great contrasts between wealth and poverty common to most underdeveloped countries are scarcely evident in Afghanistan.' The result is that landless peasants and landowning peasants consider government officials much more oppressive than they do big landlords. This situation was reflected to a degree in the platforms of contending parties and individuals in the election campaigns which attacked the 'state' (dawlat), 'bureaucrats', and 'reactionaries' more than they attacked the 'feudals', 'khâns', 'arbâb', and 'capitalists'. The moderate leftists, commonly referred to as Parchamyan, followed this strategy and made considerable headway in the rural areas. Had it not been for government intervention in 1969, the few candidates they had put up in the rural constituencies would have been elected. For quite other reasons, the success of the Parchamyan and candidates of other parties could not become a danger to the government. But the government, by unwise intervention, weakened the constitutional process.

The main sources of weakness of the opposition parties were their multiplicity and intraparty and interparty squabbles. With the dawn of the constitutional period, a number of parties had become active in spite of the fact they were not legal. Every one of them gradually split up, mainly owing to personality clashes. The most organized party of constitutional leftists, was, for instance, divided into four splinter groups. By 1971, some twenty to thirty factions were said to exist. According to one observer, these parties were 'functioning rather like "political seminars", educating their members to make an intelligent choice when parties became legal'. Among them, only five had the appearance of modern political parties in ideology, organization, and number of followers. These were the Progressive Democratic Party (constitutional reformist), the Democratic Peoples' Party (moderate Marxist), the New Democratic Party (radical Marxist), the Afghan Social Democrats (nationalist), and the Muslim Brotherhood (religious). Except for the last, no part was really premonarchy, but for reasons of legality, antimonarchical sentiments were not expressed, especially after the imprisonment of Muhammad 'Osman Landay, leader of the extreme Marxist party, for his antimonarchical remarks.

But the most salient feature of the unofficial party life was the squabbling among leaders. Leaders apparently blamed each other on ideological grounds, but in reality they were simply not willing to accept the leadership of a person who suddenly emerged out of the blue. The reasons for this are both historical and sociological. For over one and a half centuries, national leadership in

20 Griffiths, Afghanistan, p. 7.
Afghanistan had been the monopoly of the Muḥammadzays, each of whom is commonly addressed even to the present day as sardār sāhib. Except during the brief reign of King Amān Allāh and before that in the second reign of Amir Sher Ali (1869–1879), it was the consistent policy of Muḥammadzay rulers to prevent non-Muḥammadzays from emerging as national leaders. Only members of some client clans and detribalized Kabulis with no independent power base were allowed to hold high state positions next to them. Of course, on the local level, leaders of tribes and villages carried on politics in accordance with the traditional game, namely that of turbūrī, based on intensive rivalry among cousins. A well-known Afghan saying illustrates the situation well: ‘In tribe, you may not become without cousins; among cousins not without brothers; among brothers not without sons.’ The game suited the rulers well, for it checked the emergence of a strong non-Muḥammadzay national leader. When it could not, he was eliminated in the name of national security. By the time the constitutional period began, no nationally recognized leaders outside the ruling dynasty were in sight.

Now that national politics had seemingly shifted away from members of the royal dynasty, and since tribal leaders and tribal politics had already become anachronistic, members of the middle class were expected to play the leading role. Broadly speaking, two groups within this class aspired to leadership. The first included Western- and self-educated senior government officials, who, more or less, were of the upper middle class. The second consisted of Kabul university graduates and self-educated members of the lower rank of government officials. Most members of the latter group belonged to the lower middle class, some of whom were drawn from urban minorities. At loggerheads from the start, the leading members of both groups had one thing in common: the need for recognition as national leaders. But this required time, since no society, especially the status-conscious society of Afghanistan, can produce instant leaders. For members of the first group (by no means a united group), a major problem was the lack of party organization. Most members of this group did not believe in party organization, and some who began to organize parties could not make it. This was the major source of their weakness at a time when national politics required the collective efforts of like-minded people, and when one-person politics were no longer effective, no matter how charismatic a personality an individual possessed. Caught up between intrigues (generally believed to be court inspired) and the devastating propaganda of rivals, the promising leaders of the first group were one by one forced out of the mainstream of national politics. This occurred despite the fact that throughout this period they alone dominated the executive. This was the biggest blow to the young Afghan democracy, since these leaders sincerely believed in parliamentary democracy and constitutionalism, and were opposed to dictatorship. But history is indifferent to failures.

The opposition parties, especially the leftists, concentrated on the university students, who were sharply divided ideologically and along party lines, although out of the total number of students (there were 8,415 students in 1971), the
number of nonaligned was the highest. Nevertheless, the organized minority kept the university and even the high schools in a state of turmoil. Indeed, pressure from the students significantly contributed to the downfall of the government in 1965, and later the resignation and replacement of three ministers of education, all cabinet members.

In Afghanistan, the relationship between state-controlled Kabul University and the government has never been good. In the past, students had made several attempts on the lives of kings. One such attempt, in 1933, was successful. Thereafter, students were kept under tight control and education was not significantly expanded until the decade of Da'ud, when the planned economic development of the country created a demand for educated personnel. By the beginning of the constitutional period, the number of Afghans who had received advanced education, at home and abroad, had considerably increased. Nevertheless, their role in national politics preceding the downfall of the monarchy was out of all proportion to their number.

Agitation had been taking place on the campus since 1965, when a few university students and residents of the city were killed by the army for pressuring the Parliament. Later, in 1969, the police attacked first a boarding school and then the university and beat up both female and male students and professors, including me. Throughout the period, the government only twice sought solutions to the university problems. In 1968, they banned political activities on the campus. In 1972, they raised average passing marks from fifty to sixty. But these old-style, stick-without-carrot measures had to be abandoned because of student opposition. In the former case, even the Parliament and professors sided with students. The introduction of academic, administrative, and cultural reforms was needed first to modernize the outmoded university, which is still only a teaching, not a teaching-research institute. Kabul University professors either dictate outdated notes to undergraduates (no courses are offered for postgraduates), make comments about current affairs, or simply do not bother to go to classes. Ironically, some among them were loud in raising the cry of patriotism. In the past, professors longed for academic freedom, but during the constitutional period it was openly abused. The result was that in none of the colleges, except perhaps the college of medicine, were students seriously engaged in learning. Confident of near-automatic graduation at the end of a four-year course, students remained receptive to ideological propaganda and rebellious toward authority. The more adventurous among them even intimidated professors. In a way, they were helped in this by the authorities who had no policies toward the situation described above and left the students to their fate only to punish them or to close the university when they became troublesome.

The approximately 450 professors of Kabul University were divided along the same lines as the students, but they were not as active. Among the professors, a factionalism of the worst kind arose. This resulted in part from university regulations calling for new elections every two years by all professors, of
members of senate and deans of faculties. The president of the university was elected for four years by members of the senate.

This shift from the traditional, centralized administrative system to a democratic system weakened the administration. In addition, among professors as among other professionals, a rift based on age and academic qualifications arose. Most high administrative and academic positions were held by senior professors, among whom a significant number either had no higher degrees or were outmoded in outlook. Because senior professors stood in the way of junior professors, a number of those who had returned recently from Western countries soon quit the country, thus accelerating the brain-drain process. But the bulk of them, secure in their positions (by university regulations, professors could no longer be dismissed without the initial approval of the professors' council), began to fight, especially in regard to obtaining foreign scholarships. All this meant that chairmen of departments and deans of colleges were unable to carry on their duties effectively. Concerned with retaining their own precarious positions, they themselves courted factions. Thus, those students and professors whose interest was purely academic were left unprotected and alienated. Leadership passed on to militant and adventurous elements, and the university, in consequence, became highly politicized. But despite excellent oratory on the campus, frequent boycotts of classes by students, and frequent demonstrations, especially after 1969, students were not a threat to public order. Nevertheless, their continued agitation against the university authority, the government and each other, along with their vehement condemnation of the 'reactionaries', 'feudals', 'imperialists', and 'neo-colonialists', kept the university in permanent turmoil.

The religious background and brilliant qualifications of the last prime minister, Muhammad Musa Shafiq (a graduate of al-Azhar and Columbia in comparative law), in combination with his energetic and magnetic personality, aroused hopes in many, especially in religious circles. During this time, rumors were in circulation that the government intended to silence the leftists by inciting religious extremists against them. The rumors gained credence when a leftist student was murdered at the university in a fashion somewhat similar to the murder of a young leftist government official in broad daylight (while in office in the province of Laghman) by a hysterical mob shortly before Shafiq's premiership. The Shafiq administration was marked by an upsurge in religious sentiments, and by his promise to bring law and order into the chaotic society. This frightened the leftists and they stepped up agitation. Now more than ever, they joined hands with others in condemning the government for establishing the Western-sponsored Industrial Development Bank, for the inefficiency and corruption of government officials in handling the situation created by an extreme drought, and for concluding with Persia an agreement over the distribution of water in the lower part of the Helmand River. On all these issues, the government found itself on the defensive, especially over the agreement with Persia, when almost all political parties opened a kind of undeclared front by continually rallying in Zarnigar Park, generally called 'the Revolutionary Hill'. In the background was
an inflationary economy, accentuated by the lack of traditional price control and basically by a rate of increase in foodgrain production which was slower than the rate of population growth.22

During the constitutional period, as during the reign of King Aman Allah, the only group of people who made profits were the businessmen, especially those engaged in export and import trade. In modern Afghanistan, this was only the second time that the government encouraged private enterprise by switching over to a liberal economic policy. The government did not adopt a protectionist policy, and in effect left the young Afghan manufacturing industries vulnerable to the onslaught of cheaper goods from abroad, especially of Pakistani and Persian origin. Afghanistan turned into something like a free international market. The development of national capital was impeded, and Afghan industrialists, distinct from those who were engaged in external trade, became dissatisfied.

A number of well-meaning Afghans warned the king of the gravity of the situation, and suggested reforming measures. As early as 1969, a noted Afghan figure, in a two-volume typescript to the king and the prime minister of the time, concluded that the country was in the grip of 'foreign imperialism'; that it was leading toward anarchy; and that unless extensive administrative reforms were undertaken, the whole system might collapse. Strangely, the well-meaning author was accused of suffering from 'an inferiority complex'.

This is not to suggest that the king was indifferent to the situation, in spite of the fact that he was 'more interested in the culture and history of his country and in open-air sports than in the practice of government and the exercise of power'.23 He had a program of his own, but his was a long-term one, intended to improve the situation by the relaxation of tensions in the region of which Afghanistan was a part. Ironically, in this scheme, external factors were considered more influential in shaping internal history. Every time a minister informed the king of the gravity of a situation, expecting him to give a signal either for the support of a policy already taken, or for initiating another vigorous course of action the king would say, 'What is important is the region'. What the king meant was that all would be well when Afghanistan was on equally good standing with all her neighbours.

In high circles it was held that during the Da'ūd decade, Afghanistan had unwisely tilted toward the Soviet-bloc countries; now was the time to have amicable relations with Muslim neighbours Pakistan and Iran, and through them with the West without antagonizing Russia, and to pay only lip service to the cause of Pashtūnīstān. Islamic sentiments were expected to prevail over Afghan nationalism, and this was expected to prepare the ground for some kind of confederation among Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. Such a confederation was envisaged as serving as a bulwark against the domination of the region by 'Hindu India', and communist Russia. For landlocked Afghanistan, the confederation was expected to open up a free passage to the Indian Ocean - a

22 M. Brant, 'Recent Economic Development', in Dupree and Albert, Afghanistan in the 1970s, p. 104.
23 Griffiths, Afghanistan, p. 91.
cherished desire of the Afghans – and to free it from too much dependence on Russia for its external trade. This was to be accompanied by the granting, by the Afghan government, of favorable concessions to foreign and internal entrepreneurs to develop the still untouched resources, especially the large Hajigak iron ores. In this way, the strangled Afghan economy was expected to develop fast, insuring the rise of a strong commercial class. In 1971, the king told me that the economic development of the country was not a serious problem, but that the tensions resulting from it might well be. At any rate, the view was that secure in the good will of her neighbors, Afghanistan was expected to follow a policy of real neutrality in foreign affairs, while at home she would be able to turn her radical opposition into loyal opposition. Hopeful of such an outcome, the king maintained that a ‘liberal and democratic constitution’ was what Afghanistan needed most and that further basic reforms were as yet premature. The army was expected to meet any possible danger. Surprisingly, the danger came from this very quarter.

Based on the system of conscription, the Afghan army is a fair representation of a cross section of the society to which, unlike a professional army, it is closely linked. This, however, cannot be said of its officers, since some minorities are excluded from their rank. The Pashtuns and Tajiks dominate the officer corps of the army. This means that unlike other branches of the government, the officer core is dominated by rural elements drawn mainly from landed proprietors but also from peasant families. Promising boys from all parts of Afghanistan are enrolled in military schools at an early age and trained entirely at government expense. Afghanistan is one of those countries where military rank carries great social prestige, and many noted civilians were formerly military officers. The latter are visible everywhere in their semi-sacrosanct uniform.

Until the premiership of Dā'ūd, the army, numbering probably 90,000, was armed with outdated weapons. This was a source of anxiety for the ruling dynasty, especially when Pakistan and Iran joined the Baghdad military pact, and the United States refused to sell modern weapons to Afghanistan. In fact, the military weakness of Afghanistan was apparent as early as 1949, when the new state of Pakistan bombarded Moghulgar inside Afghanistan and the Afghan government retaliated with mere verbal war. Moreover, the Western powers, especially the United States, supported Pakistan rather than Afghanistan on the Pashtunistan issue and the monarchy felt in danger. It was held that the monarchy had no alternative but to turn to the West. It was thought unlikely that the monarchy would turn to the Soviet Union, and the latter would be unwilling to strengthen a backward Muslim country with a reactionary regime ruling over it. What actually happened was that Premier Dā'ūd, with the reluctant support of the king, decided to change the course of Afghan foreign policy in favor of contacts with the Soviet-bloc countries.

It was the height of the Cold War. The Soviet Union had just embarked on a new course of action against her encirclement by the United States-dominated

24 Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 510.
military alliances and showed remarkable willingness to assist Afghanistan, and to make it an example of cooperation between two countries with opposite political regimes. The result was that, with the help of the Soviet technicians, the Afghan army was equipped with modern and sophisticated weapons. By 1970, approximately 7,000 military officers were trained in Russia and Czechoslovakia. In contrast, only 600 received training in the United States, and a smaller number in Britain and Turkey. The monarchy and the central government were strengthened considerably.

Here we are concerned with the overall impact of this modernized army on the society, especially its role in the downfall of the monarchy. Our attention must, therefore, be focused on the army officers. In this period they were open to modern (one might say, 'radical') influences, as a result of which they became conscious of their position. All junior officers, especially the graduates of Kabul military academy, were bitter about their low wages, an inheritance of the highly disproportionate system of wages, originally constituted by Amir ‘Abd al-Rahmān in the late nineteenth century. The gap between the pay and various fringe benefits of these two groups of officers was extremely wide. Like junior university professors, junior military officers were resentful of their superiors, viewing them as outmoded, and unfit for their high posts. Noncommissioned officers (khurddabits) did not even have military titles, the illiterate peasant soldiers were trained (not educated) under conditions of strict discipline and provided with only the most basic necessities of life. Some were even assigned to officers who employed them as domestic servants. This explains why their families considered them a loss during their two-year service ‘for the country, the religion and the king’.

The Soviet-trained officers were denied responsible positions in spite of the fact that they felt more competent than their colleagues trained in the West in handling the Soviet-made weapons. They were, in addition, looked upon with suspicion. It was feared that they were communists at heart, since every one of them, no matter what his field of study in Russia, was also obliged to take courses in dialectical and historical material and in the history of the international communist movement. Whether these officers were really communists is highly debatable, but there is no doubt that they were against the establishment and in favor of social justice. As noted earlier, most of these officers were related to small, landowning families of the rural areas whose basically democratic outlook—shaped by the conditions of an egalitarian society and the Islamic concept of social justice—was reinforced by the Marxian view of social justice and morality as practiced in Russia. In particular, they viewed the monarchy as the highest expression of social injustice. In the words of one knowledgeable Afghan, ‘Many of them came back [from Russia] with hatred for the king.’

The army administration was entrusted to those who were directly responsible to the king, and court-related Muhammadsay commanders. The civilian governments had no say in its administration. During this decade, when six governments came and went, only the minister of the army remained the same. The army was a state within a state. And in this state, real power was exercised by the General Abd al-Wali, the king’s first cousin and son-in-law. The king had promoted him to the rank of general and commander of the central forces, apparently as a counterpoise to Muhammad Da’ud, whom General Abd al-Wali had opposed in family meetings on high policies even during his premiership. Ambitious, authoritarian and in the words of one observer, ‘sincerely dedicated to his nation’, General Wali felt entitled to play a vital role in the destiny of Afghanistan as his cousins had done. He was one of the two royal princes, who spoke both Dari and Pashtu, the latter the national language of Afghanistan. Everyone had heard that if things went bad for the monarchy, General Wali was there to save it. He had formed a special ‘striking force’ (ghand-i-darba), consisting of well-built Pashtuns and others, and trained in the modern technique of striking. In loyalty and dedication, this force was similar to the shiah sevan of Shāh ‘Abbas the Great of the Safavid Persia, and of the ghulām-i-shāh of the Sadozay rulers. But General Wali’s ‘consolidation of power had created many enemies and the bulk of the officer corps had remained loyal to Daoud’. Abdul-Wali was equally unpopular with educated Afghans, especially the opposition parties, ever since 1965 when he issued an order to fire on a marching crowd without consulting the government. Insignificant as it may seem, this incident, known as the Saywem-i-‘Aqrab, and commemorated every year, initiated an era of open agitation which ultimately led to the failure of the constitutional system.

During this time, from all outward appearances, Muhammad Da’ud lived quietly in Kabul. Ill-feelings between him and the king had become apparent shortly after Da’ud’s downfall. Later, relations between them improved and the king talked about him courteously to visitors, including myself, in 1971. But Da’ud, in whose blood politics had mixed (in the words of one distinguished foreign statesman), was waiting for the right moment to strike. He was probably contemplating action in 1972, when the effects of a severe drought had produced widespread discontent. In his own words, ‘for more than a year the subject [of taking action] was being considered by some friends, and various plans discussed. Only when anarchy and the anti-national attitude of the regime reached its peak was the decision for taking action taken.’ It is not clear who the ‘friends’ were or where the meetings took place. Da’ud was free to call on friends. He received visitors in Cheltan, his suburban estate. But the place where he could talk most freely was the site of a maternity hospital in Shārārā in the city. He was personally supervising construction of the hospital which was to be contributed to the government upon completion. It is generally assumed that he met there with his ‘friends’ or with the emissaries disguised as masons or workers.

On 1 July 1973, in about six hours (from 01.00 to 07.20), 65 officers and 240 men of the Special Unit, plus elements of the First Armored and Parachute Regiment, occupied strategic points in the city including the Palace and the Radio Station. Only 23 men (mainly military) knew of the plan; the others simply carried out their orders. No organized resistance was offered. A few policemen, who resisted the advance not knowing what it was about, were killed. General Wali, the heir apparent (the king was in Italy) and a number of senior royalist officers, as well as some cabinet members, were arrested in the first instant. Military commanders everywhere received the news of the coup immediately, but when they heard that Daud was leading it, they simply waited for his orders. Indeed, they and Afghans throughout the country were pleased to hear Daud's voice over the radio announcing that 'the absolute monarchy' was replaced by 'a republican system, consistent with the true spirit of Islam'. He also announced that he would introduce 'basic reforms' aimed at the actualization of 'a real democracy to serve the majority of the people' as opposed to the 'pseudo-democracy' of the 'corrupt system', that was based 'on personal and class interests, intrigues and demagogy'.

In conclusion, the principle of hereditary succession to the throne had not taken root in Afghanistan. The personality of the rulers was, in effect, more important than the constitutions aimed at institutionalizing the monarchy. The constitutions of 1923, 1932, and 1964 were not allowed to become really operative. Consistent with political practices in the country, it was the most capable person (or persons) among members of the royal dynasty, not necessarily the king, who was most influential. The monarchy was strong only when it had a loyal army enabling it to strengthen its hold over the country. Whenever possible, the actual rulers became the target of attack. This became decisive in the constitutional period when the army, supported by a capable member of the dynasty, also turned against the monarchy. The army, which until then had influenced national politics, is now directly involved in it, and is likely to dominate it for a long time to come. But there is no guarantee that postmonarchical stability will remain permanent unless the new regime legitimizes its rule by granting a new and really effective constitution and/or winning the support of the people by improving their enviable conditions of life.

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