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AFGHANISTAN RUSSIA'S VIETNAM?
AFGHANISTAN, RUSSIA'S VIETNAM?

by

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INTRODUCTION

The following paper is based on my collaboration with Mr. Zia Nassry in organizing the details of his trip to the North West Frontier, as well as his interviews with Afghans abroad, in the United States, Germany and Rome.

Supplementing Mr. Nassry's information with research of my own, I prepared a "briefing paper" for his use in making public the Afghan rebels' view of the current situation in Afghanistan. As a spin-off to that project, I wrote this piece, a narrative of a vicarious journey to the North West Frontier.

This paper has had an interesting history. I gave a copy to my friend Zia before his second trip to Pakistan. There he xeroxed hundreds of copies and gave them to such disparate persons as Mohammad Anwar Nuristani, Robert Trumbull of the New York Times and M. Mamdoud of the Jam'iyat-i Islam Party. I can only guess what these people made of the story!

Zia Khan is now (round three) on his way back to Pakistan, via Iran, with more copies of this story. I shall be very amused if his route takes him to Qom.

David Chaffetz
New York, May 1979
Peshawar, NWFP. They call this the five-meter government. The metalled road leads from here to the Afghan capital, Kabul, and it is five meters wide. On either side of the road is the tribal area where government control, even in the best of times, is indirect. In the aftermath of the leftist take-over of Afghanistan in April of 1978, the tribes of the Sarhadd (the North West Frontier, on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border) reject even this tenuous authority of the government which they regard as communist and materialist. To underline the religious cast of their opposition, they have rallied around traditional religious leaders, and declared a jihad, or holy war, against the government in Kabul. In the 19th century the emergence of a charismatic religious figure among the tribes was usually an imperial-sized headache for the British in India. Today the jihad emanating from this Pakistani provincial capital is a serious threat to the Soviet-backed regime of Nur Mohammad Taraki and threatens to embroil that government and its Soviet advisors in a drawn out and expensive war of attrition with this fiercely chauvinist tribal population.

Each day across the 1000 mile long frontier of Pakistan and Afghanistan, tracks and smugglers trail bring refugees and rumors into Peshawar. The embarrassed Pakistani government officials provide the barest human needs for this influx of refugees while trying to play down their political activity in Peshawar. In fact the refugee camps are the scene of intense political activity. The refugees have one express purpose - to organize the "liberation" of their homeland from what they regard as a Russian client regime. In the camps one finds Afghans from all walks of life, members of the old elite including former members of parliament, military officers and civil servants, as well as random victims of the new regime's increasingly wide net of violence. The latter group's numbers swell as reports (or rumors) of the regime's reign of terror penetrates the outlying provinces of Afghanistan.

An observer of Afghan politics would relish the odd alliance formed in the camps between bitter enemies of former days. Here Republicans and Royalists, joined under the motto, "my enemies' enemy is my friend," have buried political hatchets as old as the century - though not without some sense of irony. "If I had been the new regime," says a former Royalist, "I would have gotten rid of just the same people they got rid of." Only now one thing is different, "they have sold the country out completely to Russia."

The camps of disgruntled politicians and panicicky property owners would hardly constitute a threat to the regime but for the support of the Sarhadd's powerful nomad tribes. It is in the domain of the tribes that the refugee's military operations take place. The Pakistani government, powerless as ever in the tribal areas, pointedly seeks to prevent the refugees from introducing foreign observers into the tribes' domain. Typically Asian, the Pakistani officials plea concern for the visitor's safety among the tribes. However, it is an open secret that one group is off to Ahmad Khel in Derra to purchase home-made assault weapons. Their foreign guest is Zia Nassry.
At the tribal khan's guest home the sprawling numbers of refugees and tribesmen are accommodated on an enormous sofra, or groundcloth. Again, an observer would note the irony of the provincial governor sitting side-by-side with the nomad khan whose smuggling and vendettas used to harry his daily office routine. When asked to explain this odd alliance a former diplomat remarked, "this is the power of Islam. These people do not see politics as we perhaps do, but they know that the new government is full of Communists and is under the thumb of Russia. In the name of Islam we will fight them."

After the mostly silent meal the informal jirga or council comes to order. The khans of the tribe and the refugees discuss the latest reports from Kabul and abroad. A traveler from Europe brings word that the royal dynasty had been approached for support for the movement and did not express interest.

"They should be hanged," says a former government official, "they were the ones who invited the Communists into our country in the first place. It started with that Mohammadzai Mohammad Daoud." There is much assent to this notion. "When he signed that treaty with the Russians (in 1953) he signed his own death warrant," says another with evident satisfaction.

Mohammad Daoud Khan, a victim of the April coup, had been instrumental in the rise of Soviet influence in Afghanistan. As royal prime minister in 1953 he signed an agreement with the Soviet Union which was to make the Afghan army entirely dependent on its Northern neighbor for arms, training and financing. With Soviet encouragement, Daoud reversed the post-war trend towards capitalist (albeit monopolistic) development in Afghanistan and embarked the nation on a series of ambitious, Stalinistic five-year plans. The effect of Daoud's policies was to give the Soviet Union a great stake in the future of Afghanistan.

That stake was imperiled by the abrupt fall of Daoud in 1963. After ten years of Daoud's Soviet gambit the development of the economy showed little improvement. Ousting Daoud by a constitutional sleight of hand, a clique of Western-educated technocrats took charge of the government. They began a dangerous game of juggling Soviet and American influence in order to gain more aid from both super powers. Their third five-year plan relied heavily (30% of expenditures) on Soviet and American financing, ostensibly for the foreign exchange component of the plan, but in reality for the basic expenditures. The juggling act, however, failed to impress either of the super powers with the sincerity of the Afghan's intentions. Aid cutbacks by both the US and the Soviet Union brought the plan's expenditures down to 40% below the previous plan, after they had been budgeted at 200% above it.

The failure of the non-alignment posture to secure aid, together with the economic stagnation caused by the emasculated plan were Daoud's mandate to return to power. After a ten-year retirement, Daoud seized power from his royal kinsman, Zaher Shah, and declared Afghanistan a republic. Among the enthusiastic supporters of the new regime were the junior army officers who had been schooled in the Soviet Union (at the rate of about 1,000 a year) under the 1953 agreement signed by Daoud. The two Afghan Communist parties, Khaq and Parcham, were likewise visible in the early days of the new regime. Observers quite naturally assumed the new regime represented a Communist takeover, with Le Monde solemnly calling Daoud "le prince rouge."
The early presumption - that Daoud's coup was a Communist takeover - taught observers the wrong lesson, for when the Communist takeover materialized in 1978 they were quick to point out their mistake five years earlier. Nevertheless there were some who understood the relations between the two events, including a quite clairvoyant minister who told US Ambassador Elliot in 1973, "I give Mohammad Daoud six years, six years before the Communists decide to dispense with him."

Meanwhile, soon after the 1973 coup, the deposed Prime Minister Maiwandwal was found dead in his jail cell. Mohammad Daoud expressed his "shock." If the Soviets did have a time table for controlling Afghanistan, their moves could not have been better timed.

Russian benevolence under Daoud's presidency made his premiership look like famine. In rapid succession the Russians offered Afghanistan hydroelectric stations, nitric fertilizer factories, a new road, irrigation in fertile Jalalabad and, the jewel of the whole complex, a natural gas industry in the North. By 1975 the Russians and the Afghans had agreed on over 70 projects.

Yet each of the projects had its catch as even the Afghans learned that there is no such thing as a free lunch. The road, for example, linked Kabul with the Soviet border with a capacity for 80-ton vehicles. There were no such vehicles in Afghanistan. But Soviet tanks... The Soviet irrigation projects were tied to fruit export agreements. This needed boost to Afghan export earnings was soured somewhat by the Soviet's classification of all Afghan produce as "lowest quality." Sorting was done in the USSR by Soviet sorters.

The Jarugduq Natural Gas Project, a joint venture between Soviet Mitroprom and the optimistically named Afghan National Oil Company, was capitalized at 62.5M rubles with the Soviets financing two-thirds of that. According to the agreement two billion cubic meters of gas were to be exported to the USSR each year after 1976. Again, this silver lining had a cloud. The measuring station was in the Soviet Union. The price of the gas was fixed in 1975 and remained there long after the world price of natural gas had soared. The Soviets had made similar agreements with Iran, but they bought Iranian gas at whatever price the Iranians asked for it. The Afghans did not have as much clout as the Shah of Iran.

Further Soviet penetration of the Afghan economy occurred in more subtle forms. The Afghan karakul market, traditionally an exclusive London affair, was partially diverted to Leningrad where it had to compete with the domestic Soviet karakul industry.

But the key source of Soviet control in Afghanistan was in the structure of the economy. Under Soviet pressure Daoud nationalized the major industrial ventures and turned them into unwieldy linchpins for massive industrialization. Afghanistan was to be a case in point - a model of Soviet style development. If the Soviet Union could not help develop a country on its own border, whose social and economic life so closely resembled parts of the USSR, where could Soviet aid be shown to be effective?
Adhering to the Soviet doctrine that industry comes first, Afghanistan joined those countries in the Middle East that must import food to feed themselves. With only four per cent of the arable land given over to the production of cash crops and with the majority of the people living on subsistence economy, this emphasis on industry was quixotic, to say the least. In order to develop agricultural produce the government concentrated on a few mechanized cooperative farms and an intensive tractorization of the rich Jelalabad region. The displaced peasants and nomads found themselves victims of what the Soviets like to call capitalist exploitation. The impinging of agribusiness (to call a spade a spade) on the countryside is a striking repetition of events in neighboring Iran, only this time the capitalist was the state, not foreign investors.

All these ventures cost the Soviet Union money but it was determined to make a go of Afghanistan. Signs in 1975 that Daoud was again tempted to play both sides of the fence brought a reassessment of Soviet policy to his regime.

Daoud Shifts to the Right

Concerned over his dependence on Soviet aid Daoud began, in 1975, a return to the non-aligned policies which characterized the last royalist governments. On the domestic front Daoud shook himself loose from his erstwhile allies in the Communist Parcham and Khalq parties by sending the enthusiastic, youthful ideologues "out to the people." The Afghan Narodniki proved no more successful in "radicalizing the masses" than their Russian predecessors had been a century before. They rusticated in the hostile provinces but, more importantly, lost their party cohesion in the capital. Daoud now had a free hand to move against the "Marxists" in the army, whom he purged in later 1975. Abroad Daoud sought to replace the declining American aid by turning to the Arab oil states. As a Muslim country, as well as one of the world's poorest states, Afghanistan readily qualified for aid from the proliferating numbers of aid and lending institutions including the Islamic Bank for Development, the Kuwait Fund and the OPEC Special Fund. Grants from Saudi Arabia included half a billion dollars for hydroelectric plants, while the U.A.E. offered 8.5 million dollars for a sugar factory. Iran, anxious to secure its Eastern border against Soviet influence, offered 2 billion dollars, surpassing even the Russians in contributions to the Afghan Seven-Year Plan.

Daoud's new posture vis-a-vis the Soviets brought him widespread support from the moderates as well as the conservative Muslim clergy who had strongly, even violently, opposed the increasingly visible Russian presence in the country. Conscious of this religious support, Daoud repaired strained relations with Muslim Pakistan and made a widely publicized journey to Saudi Arabia via Islamabad and Pakistan.

These moves were too palpable a reversal for the leftists slowly recovering from their 1975 set-back. A reformed Khalq and Parcham party stepped up activity against the regime, which resulted in a brutal crackdown on students and officers in the capital. Pay raises for the army and subsidized prices for the civil service (which cost the government 3 billion rupees a year) did not win Daoud broad support in the face of a 20% inflation. Slipping into a siege mentality Daoud authorized the assassination of seven prominent leftist personalities, while sending into diplomatic exile even sympathetic moderates. The purge of 1978, more far-reaching and final than in 1975, gave the Khalq and Parcham parties the choice of liquidation or revolution.
How disturbed the Soviets were at the reversal of their protégé Daoud and how much of a role they played in his overthrow is impossible to know. But the scale on which they have backed Daoud's leftist successors speaks volumes. Over twenty-five agreements were signed by the new regime in the first year of power, an unusual act of diplomacy for a government hardly secure in its own capital. While street-fighting went on in the capital the government began contracting for Bulgarian television and East German printing equipment, among the many Comecon agreements. Castro paid a brief visit months after the revolution, while the German P.D.R. President cabled his warm regards.

The Taraki Regime

"I used to have lunch with Taraki and Hafizullah Amin every day for two years," says an Afghan now living in exile. "Taraki, he was a weak, kindly sort of man. But Hafizullah Amin, very sharp, a very good speaker. He wants Power."

Observers who had been quick to call Daoud a Communist in 1973 were now willing to give the Afghan regime the benefit of a doubt. Said one long-time student of the country, "I think they're raising their voices higher to be heard above Daoud." It is hard to know the motives and goals of the new regime at the moment they seized power. Some say that before Khalq could consolidate its power (by muscling out Parcham) it needed to disguise the extent of its Communist commitment. Others suggest that the Taraki regime was forced down the Communist path by the widespread opposition to the regime. The chief accomplishment of the regime in protecting itself from internal opposition has been the signing of a defense treaty with the Soviet Union. Whatever Taraki's aspirations might have been before that, he now finds himself locked in.

The US State Department, unwilling to invoke an automatic clause cutting off $15 million aid to Afghanistan, refused to label the country Communist. But events in the wake of Taraki's trip to the USSR have made it difficult to come to any other conclusion.

The Afghan cabinet meets in joint session with the Politburo. Meanwhile, in the countryside, the peasants are organized for voluntary labor in road construction (Ex-king Zahir Shah abolished corvee labor in 1968). Demonstrations of workers, landless peasants, students and soldiers are staged in the towns while Taraki's homestead is designated a national shrine. A party newspaper, Da Afghanistan Engelab is launched.

On his December, 1978 trip to Moscow, Taraki noted, "Russia separated from the capitalist world. Since that time, other countries have increased their efforts to join the socialist camp. Now the socialist camp plays an interesting role in world affairs..."

Interesting indeed. For the twenty years of inconclusive Soviet aid to his country Taraki has this to say, "The Soviet Union extended unconditional aid. Although some were not pleased, the aid was so beneficial to the toilers, no one could object to it." Congratulating the USSR on the occasion of the October Revolution over Afghan television, Taraki noted, "the people of Afghanistan know in their hearts that they and the people of the Soviet Union are full of love for one another."
Religious Opposition

There were some Afghans with little love for the Russians. In the first weeks of the revolution the conservative clergy showed its displeasure at the new regime by denouncing it as "communist and materialist." So had they condemned Daud's regime five years earlier. Observers expected that the new regime would make overtures to the clergy. In fact they did with Taraki proclaiming the "Muslim character" of the revolution. But rumors of persecution of the clergy were already afoot through the Muslim world. A key religious spokesman in Pakistan, Mufti Mahmud, as well as the Mufti of Tyre accused Taraki's regime of massacring their colleagues in Kabul. Whether or not these accusations had an element of self-fulfillment or not, the government's persecution of religious leaders is no longer a secret.

In February of 1979 one of the country's most noted religious leaders, Hazrat Shor Bazar Mojaddidi, was killed in a surprise government raid on his compound in the capital. According to some reports as many as 120 of his followers and kin died in the raid. With that, an exodus of religious figures to Pakistan turned from a trickle into a flood.

The power of the religious leaders has an unquantifiable element. Neither tribal chiefs nor official functionaries, their influence over the masses is based on personal charisma and reputation. As such they have always been at odds with the central government whose bureaucrats suspect the motives and methods of the "saints" as they are popularly known. But it is their very reputation for being above politics and power that makes them so powerful among the tribes. Thus of all the political figures in exile in Pakistan, it is to the Mojaddidis and Sayed Ahmad Gailani that the tribesmen look to for leadership.

Now seriously the Taraki regime treats these saints can be surmised from the amount of time they devote to discrediting them in print. Going back to the history of Afghanistan in the 20's and 30's, the Kabul press accuses the Mojaddidis and the Gailanis of having been British agents, obscurantists who fought reform with every low weapon, in defense of "a religious code known as the 'Shariah.'" Gailani, educated at Kabul University and al Azhar, is anything but an obscurantist. The Mojaddidis, one of the most distinguished religious families in Islam, have served as diplomats in the Arab world. Now they and the Taraki regime are bitterest enemies.

Asked why he left Afghanistan Gailani replies, "Because of the Communist and materialist government in power there. And we will not return until that government is overthrown."

Strategy for Revolution

For all the proclamations of jihad, immediate assault on Kabul, uprisings across the country, the conflict has all the hallmarks of a prolonged conflict. For one thing, the revolutionaries cannot risk a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union which a direct attack on Kabul would inevitably engender. The leaders of the jihad are understandably reluctant to acknowledge this point. "We are only 18 miles from the Afghan border, 50 miles from Jelalabad, 100 miles from Kabul," says one of the tribal khans, arguing for rapid attack.
The Soviet build-up at Bagram, where an all-Soviet team of groundcrew and fliers is preparing Kabul's airport for massive air-lift capability, is a source of great concern to the mujahidin. "If we don't attack before they build that base," a commando complains, "you can forget Afghanistan. Finish."

There is some evidence that a long war of attrition would be acceptable, however. The main business of the tribes, besides herding, has been smuggling. The fact that official Afghan-Pakistani trade has been conducted under restrictive currency agreements has effectively closed the open market to many consumer goods sought in Afghanistan. Nomad smuggling fills that gap and the weaker the government control in the frontier region, the greater the volume of trade. Since the outbreak of hostilities between the mujahidin and the government, smuggling has flourished. The tribesmen have, at least, an economic incentive to pursue the war.

There are also strong economic disincentives to accede to the new regime. Like most Middle Eastern governments, and particularly leftist ones, the Taraki regime has plans for "rationalizing" the pastoral industry of Afghanistan. Continuing a Republican project sponsored by the World Bank they have opened a livestock slaughter-house in Herat and set up a field service veterinary group for the nomads of the Western part of the country. The plan includes a government monopoly - at a fixed price - for the purchase and marketing of the nomads' meat. So far there have been few, if any, takers. The concept of the plan is to deprive nomads of their free market, cut off the lucrative smuggling trade with meat-hungry Iran, impose government taxes, military service and political direction over the tribes and, eventually, sedentarize them on the government's terms. Free pastoralism is not possible in a socialist state. Following the Soviet lead in abolishing nomadism - a vestige of "feudalism" - the Taraki regime intends to abolish pastoralism in Afghanistan. The nomads, many of whom are refugees from Stalin's genocide of pastoralists in the 1930's, do not need to have this explained to them.

Fighting for their economic existence the nomads are bound to be more tenacious than the jihad of Islam suggests. Behind them is a significant history of hold-outs against Kabul regimes of past times.

A Waziri chief recounted his tribe's participation in combat over the past 60 years. "In the War of Independence the Wazirs with great courage and manliness engaged the British - even with their aircraft and cannons - with mere sticks and stones. Later, in the civil war, we overcame the government's troops and occupied Kabul. And without our help Nadir Shah would never have sat on his throne." The Waziri makes it perfectly clear that he considers his tribes of 400,000 the king-makers of Afghanistan. He omits mention of the effective coup d'état of 1963 when the tribal uprising in protest against Daoud's flap with Pakistan (during which the border was closed) ended Daoud's first decade in office.

The tribes of the North West Frontier number somewhere between two and three million pastoralists. If the inflated number of the "official" Afghan population is reduced to the "best guess" of the SUNY team, from 17 million to 11 million, this nomad proportion accounts for a significant part of the population. Add to that the fact that the fact that these are the richest, the best organized, the best armed (in a country where the average man is a walking arsenal) and the
most politically acute citizens and you have the size of the Russian headache. The Waziris and the other Afghan tribes have been king-makers from a logic which goes beyond tribal lore and tradition. They are the political muscle of every Afghan regime - from the first monarchy in 1747 to Daoud's last tenure as president.

Faced with a rebellion of a quarter of the population, the best the Taraki regime can do is to hold the fort - Kabul with its 600,000 people, plus the four other major urban areas, 160,000 in Kandahar, 111,000 in Herat and the 163,000 in the urban corridor which makes up the industrial North. Significantly, in this area along the Soviet border, the new regime is making Turki, the common language of Afghanistan's heretofore culturally repressed Turkic population, one of the official languages of Afghanistan. Undoubtedly seepage of prosperity from the USSR, plus this generous ethnic policy and the fact that the industrial North is more amenable to Soviet planning policies than the rest of the country, will help solidify the regime's hold on this region. But the territory adjacent to the Soviet border would hardly have been a problem for them.

The experience of tribal rebellions elsewhere in the Middle East suggests how tenacious and unamenable to settlement they can be. In Iraq, for example, the Kurds managed to hold out against the Baghdad government despite their considerable Soviet backing for 15 years. Likewise in the Sudan the Equatorial provinces kept up a civil war against the government in Khartoum for over twenty years. The fact that both of those conflicts ended with capitulation by the rebels disguises the more significant point. Both Baghdad and Khartoum experienced sudden about-faces in the course of the wars, with the pro-Moscow clique deposed from power and a conciliatory regime installed in their place. The lesson should not be lost on observers of guerrilla wars in the Middle East - the mountains, valleys and deserts of the region are indeed a "friendly sea" for the guerrillas to swim in.

Of course, Afghanistan is not Kurdistan or the South Sudan. It shares an 800 mile-long border with the USSR, which makes the Soviets both extremely concerned and thoroughly capable of shoring up their client regime. But there are other differences from Iraq and Sudan which are in the mujahidins' favor. Neither in Iraq nor the Sudan was a crucial, dominant part of the population engaged in the conflict, nor did they have the ideological support of religion in their struggle. The Kurdish insurrection was identified by many Kurds as a personal power play on the part of Molla Mostafa Barzani; the secessionist tendencies of South Sudan were laid at the door of imperialist plots against African integrity. In Afghanistan there is less ambiguity about the issues at stake.

The Course of the War

Fighting began almost immediately after the revolution in provinces where local brigands only needed an excuse to flaunt local authority. But the violence soon assumed a different cast. In May of 1978 three regions of Nuristan rose in revolt against the government. The Nuristanis, recent converts to Islam, are known to be among the most strict observers of the faith and, in their own mountain fastness, maintainers of a prickly independence. The government had 1,000 soldiers to hold down the rebels. By October a general uprising took
shape, provoking the government to bring in artillery and MIGs to deal with the insurgents. By their own admission the Nuristanis lost 350 in the fighting. The government force now amounted to a division, one of nine in the Afghan army. With winter, and operations winding down, the government and 3,000 rebels lay stalemated in a narrow valley. 

By winter the main source of concern for the government was no longer Nuristan, but the North West Frontier. The main tribes, Waziri, Mohmand, Afridi and Yusufzai, with over 400,000 men of military age (that is, between 12 and 60), declared for the opposition. The chiefs of those tribes met in a jirga, or council, with the refugee leaders and the saints pressing for a direct attack on Kabul. Prudent council aware of the effect of the government's air superiority over the Nuristanis, cautioned against a general attack. The jirga must also have considered the implication of Taraki's December 7th defense treaty with the USSR and wondered how the tribal forces could confront a Soviet-backed army defending its own capital. The build-up of the government forces both in Kabul and at the strategic juncture between Nuristan and the tribal area, on the other hand, threatened to make further operations impossible.

The rebel leaders stalled the attack by promising to seek outside aid for the tribal army, including more modern weapons and anti-aircraft capability. The saints had already been invited by the U.A.E. to discuss humanitarian aid for the Muslim refugees, while familiar venues led to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia where willing ears were ready to listen. Polite promises made in the chancelleries of Riyadh might have little impact on the North West Frontier, but the hope influenced the tribal chiefs to stall their attack.

They did not put off the long awaited declaration of jihad, a holy war against the Taraki regime. The proclamation was carried from refugee camp to tribal compound by saints and their followers to deafening salvos of ammunition fired in welcome. "Where," asked a mujahidin, "are we going to get the money to pay for that wasted ammunition." A rifle, he points out, costs more than a machine gun because it is less expensive to employ.

The Russian View

Have not the Soviet leaders in their years of dealing with Afghanistan foreseen many of the problems they now face in backing the Taraki regime against this seemingly implacable opposition? After all, the Bolshevik's lightning campaign of conquest in Central Asia, the subjugation of the local elite and the building of an oasis of development in the steppe all took place in an environment historically and geographically linked to Afghanistan. It is the very success of the Soviets in Central Asia that creates a perceptual problem for them in Afghanistan.

In Soviet Central Asia the Bolsheviks had found a country of latifundia, of extreme division of class between the peasants and the often absentee landholding khans. The central government was as extensive as it was despotic. By toppling the chief khans, the Bolsheviks simply took over the administration and rebuilt the society on the socialist model - though not without much bloodshed and an exodus of refugees to Afghanistan.
Soviet anthropologist Monich warned the Bolsheviks about the different conditions to be found in that kingdom below the Amu Darya. In his *Letter from Turkistan* (1927) he wrote, "landlords greater than these (owners of 100 acres) can be counted on one's fingers. As one leaves Turkistan, the domain of the small landholders increases. Yet nowhere does the peasantry experience such horrors as where it is economically independent... feudal landlords moderate the bandit treatment of the peasants by the officials."

The social role of the khans of Afghanistan today in most of the country remains as Monich described it. Where the central government is weak or represented by a rapacious civil service, the tribal chieftan is the best protection against anarchy or tyranny. Far from being the parasitic, "feudal" class that the Bolsheviks encountered in Central Asia fifty years ago, the khans of Afghanistan are vital to the social survival of their people.

It is the Russian insensitivity to this, their confidence in bureaucracy and centralization as the solution to problems of development and political integration, that blinds them to the challenge that faces them in Afghanistan. If the mujaheddin are seen as victims of ideologically autonomous perceptions, the Soviet strategists in Afghanistan seem equally locked into their own ideology.
NOTES


5. Kabul Times, 11/1/75

6. " " 10/29/77


8. Washington Post, 6/5/76


10. Anis, 3/5/78

11. " 8/5/78

12. Kabul Times, 11/5/78

13. Letter from Waziri chief in author's possession.