Dear reader:

I would like to add that "The Taliban: Seeking a Lost Glory" was originally my master thesis, on which I have further elaborated. I began collecting materials on the Taliban in mid-1995, when the information about them was trickling down in small drops from various sources. My main difficulty was puzzling together the bits and pieces of information which I scarcely found, each painting a different picture of the Taliban.

*Afghanistan Forum* has been one of my main sources of information. Knowing that the content of the Forum is entirely the contributions of the subscribers, I thought I should give back a little in return, to thank the Forum and its contributors for their valuable information towards my paper. As we say in Afghanistan: "*barg-e sabz tuhfa-e darwish ast,*" meaning (in Dari) 'green leaf is the gift of a darvish.'

My paper is still a work-in-progress, therefore not accurately edited. Please kindly excuse the minor mistakes you may encounter in this paper. The materials I have gathered for this work are almost entirely secondary sources. I have tried to place the Taliban in a wider scene, in order to present a complete spectacle. Nonetheless, this work is not entirely complete. By the coming summer, I am expecting my work to be complete and hopefully published into a book, soon thereafter.

I sincerely hope that you find this paper helpful and informative. If you would like to contact me, you can e-mail me at <rameenm@hotmail.com>.

Rameen Moshref
"I had a dream," said Maulawi Mohammad Umar, the one eyed cleric and Soviet-Afghan War veteran, to his former commander. "I dreamed that the Holy Prophet appeared before me and said we must bring peace." The ex-commander, now patron of a religious school in the Afghan province of Qandahar, replied, "go for it!" Maulawi Mohammad Umar gathered about 50 like-minded individuals, executed a notorious local warlord, and then captured a well-stocked arsenal base in the Pakistan-Afghan border town of Spooen Baldak. Thus the Taliban movement was formed.

Legends and myths have always accompanied the birth of a great event. Throughout my research I found many different versions of how the Taliban “movement” came about, and what the elements responsible for its formation were. As it is a current and evolving movement, I will not present only one theory or perspective, but a well-rounded view of the origins and development of the Taliban.

While sweeping across three quarters of Afghanistan, the Taliban generally did not face serious resistance. Since their rise to prominence from the small town of Spooen Baldak in 1994, this religious Student Militia has conquered town after town and province after province, winning over many petty and powerful warlords. Due to their claimed identity, cause, motive, and diplomacy which is complemented by a comfortable bank roll, the Taliban have succeeded in controlling three quarters of Afghanistan with lightening speed. Usually local commanders are won over by the Taliban who rent their loyalties with generous patronage.

The Taliban currently hold the majority of Afghanistan’s thirty-two provinces. Numbering over 60,000 fighters, they are the largest army in Afghanistan. The mystery surrounding the Taliban generates curiosity regarding their identity, origins, supporters, and their ultimate objective(s). Let us first probe into the past, in order to put the Taliban movement into perspective.

After the Communist takeover in 1978, and the Soviet invasion in 1979, people were pouring out of Afghanistan, settling predominantly in the West or in the neighboring countries of Iran, Pakistan and India. During the early to mid-1980’s Pakistan was flooded by over two million Afghan refugees, and Iran over one and a half million. Most Western aid was concentrated on Pakistan, due to the American fallout with Iran with its Islamist and anti-Western policies. Camps were set up in the Northwest Frontier Province [NWFP] of Pakistan, which borders Afghanistan for hundreds of miles. As the Soviet-Afghan War dragged on, US aid to the Afghans increased dramatically from $30 million in 1980 to $600 million between 1986-89. Saudi Arabia and other Arab states contributed about the same amount as the US. After the Soviets left in 1989 and the Communist regime collapsed in 1992, foreign aid to the Afghan refugees dwindled. The US claimed victory for their part in the fall of Communism, expecting Afghanistan to magically return to normal after a decade of ethnic division and faction quarreling.

By this time traditional sources of income now all but vanished, and many people looked to other means to support themselves and their families. As a result, Afghanistan became a haven for the drug and arms dealers of the world. This lawless land provided unlimited opportunities for those who spoke the language of the poor. Smuggling or 'trade' as the locals called it, became a new occupation for the people. Local commanders had set up numerous checkpoints on the major highways to collect tolls from trucks carrying goods from neighboring countries to cities where there was a great need for basic commodities.

Some veteran Mujahidin sold their war experience and expertise to anyone who was willing to pay them. These young mercenaries had never known peace: they had no home, no family, no hope and no foreseeable future. They had no education that could help them find civilian employment, but suddenly there was a demand for the Afghan fighters. Today, in the name of Islam, Afghans are fighting in Chechnya, Bosnia, Algeria, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Kashmir and other places.

Disgusted with the endless civil war, a number of the Mujahidin joined the madaris 'religious schools' run by Pakistan's Jam slightly different than others. 3 In the beginning the Taliban were insisting to act as a neutral force among the factions 4 The Taliban are largely financed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan 5 Compared to General Dostum’s 50,000 and Mass’ud’s 20,000 soldiers
The Taliban, or at least their leaders, are, mostly from the Pashtun ethnic group belonging to the Durrani tribe, the tribe that had historically ruled Afghanistan. The Communist regime was, in contrast, dominated by the rival tribe of Ghilzai Pashtuns. The Taliban are generally ultra-conservative Sunni Moslems and traditional Afghans, claiming not to recognize ethnicity or sectarianism. They also claim that their guide and law is the Holy Quran, and that their Faith is Islam: both the Quran and Islam condemn division among Muslims based on any category.

A decade of war had left neighboring Iran and Pakistan weary of the refugee problem. At the same time, foreign aid dried up due to the Communist withdrawal from Afghanistan in April 1989. The power struggle put further strain on the economies of Afghanistan’s neighbors, and the fall of the Soviet Union added to the complexity of the situation there. A change was urgently needed, and it finally arrived, spread through myths, born out of the frustrations of the people, in one of the most important provinces of Afghanistan, Qandahar.

The Taliban burst into the Afghan military scene in late 1994, achieving an overwhelming and remarkable string of successes. They were carefully referred to as a Movement, not a faction, and were not named after their leaders. Mullah Mohammad Hassan, the governor of Qandahar, recalls that the name Taliban was adopted in the summer of 1994. The Arabic word Talib, seeker or student, i.e. religious student, has been incorporated in the Iranian language family to mean the same thing. Most sources agree that the core of the movement is mostly comprised of veterans of the Afghan-Soviet War. When the Soviets evacuated Afghanistan on May 15, 1989, and the factions began fighting among themselves for the control of Kabul, especially after the fall of President Najibullah in 1992, some fighters became disgusted with the crimes being committed by their colleagues. They left the civil war for Pakistani NWFP camps to seek refuge and religious training, most having no home or family to which to return.

The madaris

A bulk of the Taliban fighters have come from madaris located in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, bordering southeastern Afghanistan. A considerable number of Tullab even obtained Pakistani identity cards and had registered themselves in the voters’ list, campaigning for the JUI during the Pakistani general elections in the early 1990’s. According to one source, JUI announced that an estimated 50,000 Tullab have been educated in Pakistani madaris, and claimed that 30,000 of them were fighting in Afghanistan. Independent observers, however, estimated that about 20,000 Tullab were enrolled in Pakistani madaris, and over 6,000 had joined the fighting when the movement began.

The Pakistani madaris exist even in strong tribal belts, although the majority are located in Quetta province, and in other Pathan areas of Pakistan. The older madaris in Pakistan, which were established before the separation from India in 1947 and in the early 1950’s, are Malala-Allam, run by Maulawi Arz Mohammad, father of the JUI deputy secretary general, Senator Hafiz Hussain Ahmad. Maulana Ismatullah, the ex-provincial Quetta Senior Minister of Finance, acknowledged in an interview the fact that the Tullab have studied for a number of years in JUI-run religious schools. He also confirmed that a number of Tullab have Pakistani identification cards, their names are registered in the voters’ list, and they are active workers in his party.

Most of the madaris where the Taliban grew up and received education were run and controlled by the Ulema [religious scholars] who are aligned with factions of the JUI, especially those led by Maulana Fazl al-Rahman belonging to the Deobandi school of thought. Suffering economic hardship following retirement from the Soviet War, young Afghans flocked to the madaris, and soon outnumbered Pakistanis. It was not unusual to find only Afghan Tullab in madaris located in remote areas of NWFP, with locals preferring to seek education in government and private schools.

These madaris have become the nest for the Afghan Tullab. Many madaris closed down when the Taliban and their teachers headed for Qandahar to reinforce the growing Taliban army. Ulema were sent to the madaris for fresh recruits as the Taliban extended their domain, capturing a host of provinces. The provincial head of the Tullab, ‘Abd al-Rashid Zahid, revealed that a number of Tullab were enlisted from the Frontier madaris in January and February 1995 with the help of the Afghan Ulema who issued a fatwa [religious decree] in favor of the Taliban and vouched for the righteousness of their cause.

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6In Arabic, the dual form of Tali, i.e. taliba, in the Iranian language family has been adopted as a plural form; in Pashtu (spoken by Pashtuns and Pathans), Urdu (spoken in Pakistan), and Dari (Afghan Persian, in contrast with Iranian Farsi, and Tajikistan’s Tajiki, all three forms of the Persian language.) Tullab is the Arabic plural form of the word talib, or seeker i.e. student.
7Tullab, plural form of Talib, a student of madrasah or religious schools. I used Tullab to refer to student of madaris
8I made a differentiation between Afghan Pashtuns and Pakistani Pathan for a more convenient distinction only
9The Deobandi school is a prestigious school of Islamic theology at Deoband, India. This tradition, much like the Wahabi movement, rejects the Sufi orders as being outside the pale of its orthodox Islam. This school also has a respectable influence on the Afghan state. Some Tullab were educated in the Ahle Hadith and Barelli madaris.
The birth
In mid-1992 about 30 Tullab met at Kashk-e Nakhud to express their concerns over the rivalries and lawlessness in the country. They felt that something needed to be done to end the chaos, and also to make solid progress towards those objectives that hundreds of thousands of Afghans died trying to preserve during the Jihad years. At the time, the Tullab did not have enough strength to bring about any major changes, so they decided to wait for a more opportune moment for action.

One day in July 1994, in the southern province of Qandahar, a guerrilla commander raped and killed three women. Local people were so outraged that a mullah [cleric], Mohammad Umar, persuaded some Tullab to take necessary action to avenge the crime. They waylaid the commander and killed him, while his men surrendered to the Tullab. Later on, Mullah Mohammad Hassan, governor of Qandahar recalled that he doesn’t know what was the final spark, but he [Umar] was the first man who approached everybody and asked them to fight against corruption, that they should follow pure Islam. They decided Mullah Umar should be their leader.

This incident seems to have given this group of Tullab a sense of unity and a reward for doing justice. Now that they had their first success, they were encouraged by their colleagues, teachers, and the public. They openly opposed paying the tax known as khudai-wo-ast, which was imposed by different local warlords in their respective areas of the ancient province of Qandahar, a Durranis Pashtun power-base. The name Taliban was chosen in the summer of 1994. According to Mullah Hassan there were 60 or 70 of them, who decided to disarm the checkpoints where the bandits were taxing people for vast sums of money. At first, as he recalls, they had to fight, but soon the bandits just gave in, because many of them were addicted to heroin and hashish, which made their job easy. It was not long before their numbers increased.

Establishing their identity as students of the Holy Quran, 30 Taliban (14 of whom were armed) forced Haji Bashir of Hizb-e Islami (Maulawi Khalis) to surrender his base and weapons depot. Their success grew with the removal of 40 check points where money was being extorted from the travelers along the 120 kilometers road from a Pak-Afghan border town to Qandahar. The people of Qandahar who had suffered at the hands of these warlords and their extortion check points greeted this new band of unaffiliated justice seekers enthusiastically.

Legends spread about Mullah Umar: he had lost his left eye in a bold attack against a Soviet position; he was a deadly shot with a manual rocket launcher. A member of the Taliban’s executive council said, “like our Prophet Mohammad, God has bestowed this human being with many abilities. He is a good teacher, a politician and military man. He is very pious, he is very kind, and he is very just.”

Thus far, the Taliban victories had not won them widespread recognition. Their subsequent adventure, however, is widely recognized as the Taliban’s coming to prominence, an act which established their capability to compete with more established groups in Afghanistan.

In October 1994, a convoy of 30 Pakistani trucks left Quetta, destined for Central Asia. According to one source, this caravan of trucks was carrying medicine, surgical instruments and food stuff to some Afghan provinces and Central Asian states, courtesy of Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Yet another source claims that it was the idea of the retired General Babar, Pakistan’s Interior Minister, who wanted to open a trade route to Central Asia. It is generally believed, however, that Bhutto had commissioned this convoy as a gesture of friendly relations towards the emerging Central Asian states.

According to the Baluchistan governor, the Taliban, before attacking Qandahar, convened several meetings in various parts of Quetta to garner support. More colleagues joined them, and the Taliban challenged four powerful commanders that same October. Amir Lalai, Mullah Naquib, and Mullah Akhtar Jan, three of the four commanders were defeated with scattered shots being fired. Charlie Santos, UN envoy Mahmud Mistiri’s assistant, told me in an interview that the Kabul government affiliated commander, Naqibullah, the fourth and strongest Qandahari commander, not only did not retaliate under the orders of President Rabbani but he surrendered his base to the Taliban, including many tanks and heavy weapons. Within two days following Naqibullah’s surrender, on November 5, 1994 Qandahar fell completely to the Taliban, who disarmed the population, thus ending years of chaos in that troubled province.

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1030 kilometers west of the Afghan province of Qandahar.
11 The word ‘Jihad’ in this paper represents from 1979 to 1989 only.
12 One article reports it was a young Talib who was raped, killed, and his body thrown on the street; another said it was two Herati girls.
13 Various stories exist concerning the beginning of the Taliban which makes it harder to judge which is correct. Moreover, there is little consistency in the stories. Nevertheless, I will attempt to make sense of them by including as many views as possible.
14 At the time, it was unthinkable for anyone to shoot at students of the Holy Quran.
15 National Logistic Cell (NLC)
16 Another source reports the convoy’s final destination as Ishq-Aabaad, capital of Turkmanistan
BABY STEPS

On the road to Kabul

In November and December 1994, the provinces of Uruzgan to the north and Zabul to the east of Qandahar fell with little resistance. By January 1995, the Taliban had moved into Helmand, a breadbasket province that also provided most of Afghanistan’s opium crop.17 In a friendly deal with the (self-appointed) provincial governor, Ghafar Akhundzada,18 (which turned into one of the largest victories to date for the student militia), the Taliban conquered Helmand in only a few days. In late January and early February, the Taliban took Ghazni province and Maidan-shahr, the capital of Wardak province, 30 kilometers southwest of Kabul, which was then held by the Islamists Gulbudin Hikmatyar.

Large scale defection of commanders, usually ethnic Pashtuns, showed a lack of tribal leadership in Pashtun dominated southwestern Afghanistan. Hikmatyar,19 the strongest Pashtun leader, proved to be no ethnic hero for the Pashtun dominated country. Perhaps three reasons for his lack of success are: 1) he is from the rival Ghilzai tribe and not the king-producing Durrani tribe; 2) he is a radical, not a traditionalist; and 3) his faction, like other Mujahidin factions is jealously fighting over power for themselves, disregarding the population. Qandahar, the source of Pashtun pride and leadership once again gave birth to another force that has won the respect and obedience of people, weary of Hikmatyar and other warlords. The Taliban leaders are careful, however, not to use Pashtun chauvinism to rally support, because using ethnic rivalry in this way would deter popular support in the predominately Tajik, Hazara and Uzbak central and northern Afghanistan.

Parallel talks between the Taliban and Mass’ud in Kabul and Charasyab revealed the government’s intention to buy time determine the extent of Pakistani support of the Taliban. President Rabbani and his Defense Minister, Mass’ud, had good reason to view ISI suspiciously. Throughout the anti-Soviet War, Mass’ud stubbornly resisted Pakistani efforts to pull him into ISI strategy that favored his bitter rival Hikmatyar, who lost popularity by mercilessly rocketing Kabul after April 1992, and befriending the former Communist militia chief, Dostum, and the Shi’a Wahdat faction. Later, Hikmatyar had fallen out of favor with the Pakistani military, which then threw its full support behind the new and far more popular Pashtun contender for power, the Taliban.

Following the SCCIRA’s20 breakup, due to Hikmatyar’s departure from his base in Kabul and Charasyab (he was by now being slowly replaced by the Taliban in a government-Taliban understanding), the Wahdat Party was left to fend for itself, vulnerable on two sides. Seizing the opportunity, Mass’ud struck at Wahdat in a powerful offensive beginning on March 6, 1995. By March 8, after hundreds of casualties, Wahdat chief Mazari turned to the Taliban in desperation and struck a fate-sealing deal, in which Wahdat would surrender its heavy weapons to the Taliban which would position itself between the two adversaries as a buffer force. This deal provided the Taliban with a foothold in the capital as the self proclaimed neutral force. Mazari anticipated a clash between the Taliban and the government. If this were to happen he would find in Taliban another powerful ally against the government. That afternoon the Taliban’s troops began moving into the strategic Deh Murad Khan quarter of Kabul.

The inevitable

In the midst of such uncertainty things were bound to go wrong. First, government forces fired on the advancing Taliban, whether intentional or in error remains unclear. The militia lost several tanks and some men before the situation was stabilized. Everything fell apart when Wahdat troops, positioned in the ruins of the old Soviet and Polish embassies on Dar al-Amaan Avenue, refused to surrender their weapons and immediately defected to join pro-government Shi’a units loyal to Akbari, a former Wahdat leader who had broken with Mazari. These defectors now turned their guns on the Taliban. On March 11, Mass’ud launched a massive offensive, deploying the full panoply of the government's military capability. The Taliban were pushed back out of the city and that evening Mass’ud was in complete control of the capital for the first time.

Meanwhile, in the west of the country the Taliban made significant gains. By mid-March 1995, they swept Nimroz and most of Farah from under the control of government loyalist Turan Ismael Khan, governor of Herat province. It was now evident that the Taliban war effort was focused on Herat, and not Kabul. As the Taliban approached Shindan, the second most strategic air

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17The south, especially Helmand makes Afghanistan one of the top producers of opium.
18One of the most powerful warlords in southern Afghanistan
19Heavily endorsed by Pakistan
20The Supreme Coordination Council of the Islamic Revolution of Afghanistan, an alliance between Dostum [Junbish-e Milli], Hikmatyar (Hizb), Sibquatullah Mujaddadi [Jabba’i-e Nejot-e Milli], and the Wahdat faction Shi’as, then headed by Mazari.
base in Communist Afghanistan, some Pashtun commanders loyal to Ismael Khan defected to the Taliban, which was nearly disastrous for Ismael Khan. Mass'ud immediately deployed 2,000 troops to Herat. Ninety-five kilometers away from Ismael Khan’s base in Herat, Shindan became the center of attention from both sides. The heaviest fighting of the civil war took place about forty kilometers outside Shindan, where government air power played a major role. While Ismael Khan was busy with the Taliban in the southwest, Dostum’s forces attacked Ismael Khan’s northwestern front along the Faryab-Bodghis provincial borders, capturing the town of Bala Murghan in late March 1995. By late April the Taliban thrust appeared to have been checked by Ismael Khan and the newly arrived Kabul force on the Herat front, but at a high price to Ismael Khan.

The government celebrated the first Taliban defeat, pushing them back to Qandahar from Herat. Reporters across the world wrote dramatic headlines announcing collapse of the myth about the invincibility of the Taliban. ‘Yes, they are human and can be stopped,’ was a common theme in almost every article. While these romantic stories were being told, the Taliban regrouped and captured the strategically important Herat, and the Shindan air base, second in importance only to Bagrom in northern Kabul.

Ma'ssum Afghani, a Taliban leader, explained that their forces entered Herat at 3 a.m. Tuesday September 5, 1995. The city surrendered without offering resistance, on the advice of the retreating Ismael Khan. Due to the defection of a few Pashtun commanders21 of Turan Ismael, who controlled Herat and four other neighboring provinces, the city was taken in two phases. The Taliban spokesman confirmed that their fighters first captured Herat airport (Shindan) and then drove into the city.

A few hours after the fall of Herat, General 'Abd al-Rashid Dostum captured Qala-e Nad, the capital of Bodghis province, bordering Turkmanistan. Thus, the most powerful figure of the north came face to face with the Taliban for the first time. This shows that, although the Taliban and Dostum had not entered into a formal coalition, they had succeeded in coordinating their attacks against the government on five fronts. It is important to keep in mind that by then General Dostum controlled seven provinces, and access to the Central Asian Republics.

The fall of Herat scared Ahtihad-e Islami (Islamic Unity) chief, Professor Sayyaf,22 Rabbani’s most important ally. Sayyaf fled his northwestern position in Paghmon, in Kabul province, and took refuge in his fortified base in the Shamshad mountains, near the Turkham pass, on the Pak-Afghan border.

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21 These commanders held key defensive positions near Herat, and when they defected to the Taliban it became impossible to defend Herat without severe causalities to the civilians
22 Heavily Saudi (Wahabi) backed
THE RITE OF PASSAGE

Force of arms
As a military force, the Taliban are termed as *lashkars*, a term carrying traditional war horde connotations rather than a modern military formation. Command and control are simple. They are not capable of assembling more than 15,000 troops on each of the eastern and western fronts. In the beginning many of the reports of 20,000 or more men were exaggerated. Air and armament capabilities were also overrated. In November of 1994 when they took Qandahar airport, the Taliban captured six MiG-21 Fishbed Interceptors and four Mi-17 helicopter transports. Two other Mi-17's were taken from Hizb commander Sarkateb's base outside Qandahar city. However, only one MiG was operational, and it was not used in combat until April 1995. Reports say that the Taliban were looking for pilots in Pakistan. Despite considerable noise about armor capability and the sophisticated weaponry of the Taliban, not much force was shown until late 1995.

Administration
Provinces under the control of the Taliban have generally consisted of little more than a governor, appointed by the Qandahar ruling Shura, a police chief and a judge. In Nimruz province, girls' schools, previously operating under Ismael Khan, were closed after the Taliban's takeover. By contrast, in Kabul schools and Kabul University which were closed during the civil war were being reopened.

The Taliban leaders also revived strict Quranic punishment such as amputation for thieves, public executions (evident from the hanging of former President Dr. Najibullah and his brother on September 27, 1996), and embarked on some radical experiments in social reorganization. The ruling Shura proscribed soccer, chess, flying kites and television saying they were anti-Islamic, and decreed an outright ban on women shopping in city bazaars. Such practices have been enforced upon the otherwise liberal Kabulis often the Taliban entered the city on September 27.

The Leaders
The Taliban leadership has remained largely unknown, and its decision making process has been little understood. Heading the movement is a Central Shura, which reportedly consists of approximately thirty members. The Shura generally meets once per month. According to J.I.R. [Jane's Intelligence Review], the Inner Shura is led by about eight men, the composition of the body changes frequently, however. Its key members currently are as follows:

Maulawi Mohammed Umar: A 36 year-old, Soviet-Afghan War veteran who was born in Qandahar to a Nurzai Durrani Pashtun family. He later moved to Kashk-e Nakhud in the Maiwand District of Qandahar province. He was wounded several times (once losing an eye) in the 1980's while with Hizb-e Islami (Maulawi Khalis). Mohammad Umar then returned to madrasah to study religion after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. He now heads the Central Shura which is based in Qandahar. Mohammad Umar reached the apotheosis of his prestige in early 1996 when a convocation of 1,600 mullahs and senior religious scholars nominated him *Amir al-Mu'minin*, Commander of the Faithful. The cloak (*Khifiga*) of the Prophet Mohammad was brought from one of Afghanistan's holiest shrines in Qandahar, and held by Mullah Umar before a crowd of thousands. Mullah Umar now dispenses his rule from a simple stone house on the grounds of the governor's palace.

Maulawi Mohammed Rabbani: Generally recognized as the second-in-command in the movement. Maulawi Rabbani was born in Qandahar, and studied in madaris in Zabul, Qandahar, and Quetta (Pakistan). He commanded Taliban troops on the front in Logar province following the government's recapture of Charasyab in March 1995.

Maulawi Mohammed Ghaus: Born in Qandahar, the son of a religious scholar, he fought in the Soviet-Afghan War with Mohammad Nabi's Harakat-i-Enqelab-Islami [Movement of Islamic Revolution] and with Hizb-i-Islami [Maulawi Khalis]. He left the battlefield in 1992. Maulawi Ghaus has been the Taliban’s political leader in Logar since March 1995.

Maulawi Ehsanullah: Born in Qandahar, he is believed to be responsible for administration of captured provinces.

Maulawi Mohammed Abbas: Mayor of Qandahar, he also heads the municipal court of Qandahar. Maulawi Abbas, is one of the Taliban's political spokesman.

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\(^{23}\)It should be noted that Maulawi Rabbani is not related to the ousted president, Burhan al-Din Rabbani
Maulawi Mohammad Hassan: Heads a group of madrasah graduates around Maiwand, the south of Qandahar, who form the core of the Movement.

Maulawi Borjan: Born in Helmand province, Maulawi Borjan commanded the Taliban troops at Charasyab in March 1995, but was wounded during the retreat. On the last Taliban offensive to take Kabul (late 1996) in a heavy fighting near Kabul, he was killed. However, his death was not revealed by the Taliban until after the conquest of Kabul on September 27, 1996.

According to Mohammad Zahid,24 who explains the Taliban’s ring of leadership as follows:

**Top Command**
Maulawi Mohammad Umar

**Inner Shura**
1. Maulawi Mohammad Rabbani
2. Maulawi Ehsanullah
3. Maulawi Abbas
4. Maulawi Mohammad
5. Maulawi Pasani

**Central Shura**
1. Maulawi Mohammad Hassan
2. Maulawi Nur al-Din
3. Maulawi Wakil Ahmad
4. Maulawi Shir Mohammad Malang
5. Maulawi 'Abd al-Rahman
6. Maulawi 'Abd al-Hakim
7. Sardar Ahmad
8. Haji Mohammad Ghaus
9. Ma’soom Afghani

**Liaison officer in NWFP**
‘Abd al-Rahman (Rashid) Zahid

**Liaison officer in Quetta**
Mohammad Ma’soom

**Kabul Six-Man Supervisory Council**

Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund

- Vice-Chair

1. Mullah Mohammad Rabbani
2. Mullah Mohammad Hassan
3. Mullah Mohammad Ghaus
4. Mullah Syed Ghayasuddin Agha
5. Mullah Gazil Mohammad
6. Mullah Abdul Razzaq

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24 Frontier Post February 24, 1995
PHILOSOPHY OF WAR

In the way of God
Almost all the opposition groups used Islam as a source of inspiration for waging war against the Soviet Union and its Kabul protégés. Historically, even dynastic and territorially motivated battles against fellow believers used religious arguments for justification. The reason for this appeal to Islam is that it gives the fighters a greater sense of direction and inspires ardent loyalty. Furthermore, the concept of martyrdom, (Shehadat) in the general Muslim perspective of life and death, generates tremendous passion in the individual Muslim.

Afghanistan is among those Muslim countries where practising Islam is customary. Thus, the Islamic tendency of almost all the resistance groups was a natural reflection of the fact that Islam is a deep-rooted cultural symbol among the Afghans. Islam had been widely practised by individuals but never penetrated the Afghan state structure. The rulers had supported the clergy mostly as a cultural symbol and as a means to enhance their own authority. But state and religion had been two different, mutually exclusive, domains.

The distinction between religion and politics in Afghan society was shaped by two factors: 1) Being outside the political arena, Islam remained separate and subordinate to the political interests of the rulers; 2) The traditional religious establishment of Afghanistan restricted itself personally to the spiritual training of the individual, seeking to indoctrinate conformation of social behavior to Islamic codes. In addition, the Afghan tribal codes, (Pashtunwali), although not strictly Shari’a, have evolved within the civil context of Islam, and in essential matters are more or less in agreement with the spirit of Shari’a.

Traditionally, three religious institutions have influenced the Afghan state: the Sufi [mystic], the Ulema [religious scholars], and the Sayyids [descendants of the Prophet]. The practices, rituals, and beliefs of the average Afghan have been shaped by powerful figures from these three traditional institutions. The Sufi institutions command a much greater following. By virtue of its influence which transcends class, high social esteem, and the financial power of its shrines, the masters of the Chishtia, Naqshbandi and Qaderiyya Sufi orders have been prominent figures in the country’s recent history. Two of the Peshawar-based Afghan parties are headed by leaders of Sufi orders: Sibqatullah Mujaddidi of the Naqshbandi and Pir Sayyid Alunad Gailani of the Qaderiya. The Sayyids also enjoy considerable personal prestige in Afghan society, although the political influence of the Sayyid families in general has been limited. However, an individual Sayyid’s following is highly dependent on his charisma and religious piety; his participation in other networks considerably enhances his influence.

The Ulema Foundation, an organization of trained scholars of Islamic law, has been an important religious institution when compared with the Sufis. The Ulema should be distinguished from mullahs, who have only a rudimentary knowledge of Islam and are based in mosques. The Sufi brotherhoods usually operate from shrines, while the Ulema are historically based at the madaris. Ulema also use the powerful arena of the mosques but are not based there. Every Friday they deliver an often political khutba (sermon) to the congregation of believers. The traditional Ulema and their mosques were never politicized until the Communists came to power. It was then that most of the prominent Ulema and their Tullab spurred the national uprising against the Communist intervention.

A great number of the Ulema were connected to the Sufi networks, which they regarded as a truly Afghan brand of Islam. However, in the modern century, the overall influence of the traditional religious networks has declined for several reasons, among which modern education and the development of a middle class intelligentsia are prime factors. A more serious challenge to the traditional practice of Islam came from radical Islamists and their political dogma. Contrary to the traditional Ulema, Islamists have secular education and address economic, social and religious issues in political terms. In thought, compared to the traditional view, the Islamists are revolutionary in the sense that they project a unified (religious) notion of state and society, as well as of the spiritual and the material.

25 Since the Soviet occupation.
CROSS-ROADS

Clash of characters

Foreign intervention notwithstanding, the question still remains as to whether social politicization will dissolve with the conclusion of this prolonged civil war. In Afghanistan, the long-term war has destroyed the traditional, social, and political order of the country. The most devastating consequence thereof is internal political and ethnic fragmentation.

Influenced by the thinking of Maududi and Sayyid Qutb, Afghan Islamism was born on the campus of Kabul University in the late 1950's, and grew in reaction to the rise of Marxist thinking among the educated youth which was promoted by professors trained at al-Azhar University, among them Professor Burrhan al-Din Rabbani, the ousted Afghan president. The movement attracted students of all disciplines. Mass'ud and Hikmatyar, both engineering students, began their political careers on the campuses of Kabul Polytechnic and Kabul University, respectively.

On the other side of the spectrum, the Taliban brought from the southern countryside a traditionalist, antiquated Islam that blends the innate conservatism of the Ulema with the strict practices described in the Pashtunwali. According to the Taliban's publicity their movement is essentially apolitical; beyond proclaiming its intentions to impose strict Shari'a laws across the country, the movement purports to have no specific political objectives. The Taliban's traditionalism has been hailed by some Western analysts as marking a return to 'real' Afghan values, a set of values alien to most non-Pashtuns.

The polar opposite of the Taliban, and, the only other major player, General Dostum, is a product of Dr. Najibullah’s ethnic mobilization which was designed to compensate for his receding power following the Russian reformulation for Central Asia. This Uzbek general is currently the only major personality who supports a secular government.

The Islamist Parties

The core of the Islamist movement was formed among the faculty of theology at Kabul University in the late 1950's. A small group of professors, inspired by Dr. Ghulam Mohammad Niazi, met regularly in a clandestine circle. These closed meetings came to be known as Tahrik-e Islami [Islamic Provocation]. Formally, the group was called Jamia ‘t-e Islami [Islamic Party]. Islamist intellectuals, such as Sibqatullah Mujaddidi, also became associated with the group. Professor Burrhan al-Din Rabbani and Maulawi Yunis Khalis, graduates of Al-Azhar University (Cairo), joined the movement and became its nucleus.

Afghanistan’s contemporary thought, with the exception of the Shi’ite branch, has been influenced by two Islamist movements, the Ikhwan al-Muslimeen [Muslim Brotherhood] of Egypt, and the Jama’t-e Islam [Islamic Party] of Pakistan. The Ikhwan and Jamaat are not two competing movements, rather they are part of a pan-Islamic movement pursuing the common goal of bringing about a unified and conservative Muslim society. Much of the influence of these movements on contemporary Afghan political thought came through the personal encounters of Afghan Islamists and their study of literature. These Afghan Ulema translated some of the major works of Sayyid Qutb and Maududi, as well as publishing their own treatises on Islam as an ideology and political system.

At the same time, due to a politically oppressive regime curtailing freedom of expression, the Islamists concentrated on preparations for spreading the influence of their movement. While remaining in the background, the Islamists at Kabul University encouraged students to launch a grass-root organization. As a result, Sozmon-e Jawaanon-e Musulmon [Muslim Youth Organization] was created to counter the leftist student groups and their rising influence. By 1970, Ahmad Shah Mass’ud and Gurbudin Hikmatyar were prominent young activists whose dedication and personal qualities attracted students to join movement. Encouraged by their success, the youth reached out to the Tullab of traditional madaris, as well as radical Ulema and school teachers in the countryside. However, they made obvious their opposition to many traditional Ulema for their conservatism and apolitical stance.

When the Islamic movement was still in a stage of primary development and had not yet taken root at the popular level, former Prime Minister Daoud,26 with the cooperation of the army’s (mostly pro-Soviet Khalqi dominated officers) and the Parcham Communist parties, overthrew King Zahir and assumed the premiership in 1973. The coalition government led by Daoud was extremely hostile to the Islamist movement. Consequently, under this oppressive regime, the Islamists either went underground or fled to neighboring Pakistan. Politically speaking, the Islamic movement thus was crippled before it could take off.

26Prince Daoud was forced to resign as the Prime Minister in 1963 by his cousin and brother-in-law King Zahir
In order to retaliate against this oppression, the Islamists, mainly the Muslim Youth Organization, wanted a military confrontation with the Daoud regime. Hikmatyar and Mass'ud found the political climate in Pakistan more favorable and went to great lengths to organize a guerrilla force there. To add insult to injury, while Rabbani was busy negotiating a political compromise with President Daoud, moderate and senior opposition leaders such as Dr. Niazi were imprisoned after the attempted coup. Rabbani had even offered to cooperate with President Daoud on two conditions: a) release of all political prisoners; and b) expulsion of the Parchamis from the government. It was a pragmatic move to open a dialogue with the government to seek the release of a group of about 200 prisoners who were considered a political and military asset, having been trained over the past decade. Rabbani did not succeed in this mission and after the Saar Revolution [1978 pro-Communist takeover] all of the Islamist prisoners were executed by the Khalqis.

Complex factors of ethnicity, social background, leadership ambitions and strategy divided the once unified party. A formal split of the Afghan Islamist movement in Pakistan in 1975 resulted in the emergence of two separate groups, one around Rabbani and the other around Hikmatyar. Rabbani, consistent with a broader or united front, wanted a deal among the intellectuals, traditional Ulema, local community leaders, and the peasantry before launching any guerrilla attacks. He seemed more inclined towards a mass movement than the militant party framework of Hikmatyar. Rabbani's moderate outlook and links with Sufi and literary networks in the north of the country earned him considerable support, particularly among the non-Pashtun ethnic groups and de-tribalized sections of the society.27

Thus the ideology of political Islamism did not prove a strong enough bond to keep the ethnically diverse movement united. While Rabbani kept Jamia't-e Islami, the original title of the movement, Hikmatyar established Hizb-e Islami. Maulawi Yunis Khalis and Hikmatyar, both ethnically Pashtun, worked together in the Hizb until 1979. The question of strategy and approach towards political and military issues resulted in a further split of the Hikmatyar group when Hizb-e Islami (Khalis) branched off from Hikmatyar's Hizb-e Islami party. While Maulawi Khalis preferred immediate guerrilla action following the Communist takeover, Hikmatyar appeared more cautious. Hikmatyar sought to establish an organized and trained force before plunging into the conflict. Khalis, much like Rabbani, is a highly accomplished religious scholar. Trained at Al-Azhar University, he has also worked in the traditional environment of the madaris. In contrast, Hikmatyar is more an intellectual and politician than an alim [religious scholar]. Competing for popularity, Jamia't and Hizb-e Islami (Hikmatyar) have been locked in a series of skirmishes inside Afghanistan, since 1985. The Takhar incident28 considerably strained relations between the two parties. Ultimately Hikmatyar decided to pull out of the interim government in February 1990, due to the Hizb-Jamia'at conflict.

**Jamia't-e Islami**

Following its break with Hikmatyar in 1975, the Jamia't has maintained its unity under Professor Burrhan al-Din Rabbani, who is ethnically Tajik and from Badakhshan province. Before the 1992 civil war29 he had the support of the non-Pashtun ethnic groups such as the Uzbaks and Turkmans, as well as Tajiks. He also had a Pashtun following, in addition to his alliance with the Ulema of traditional madaris.30 Rabbani was inspired by the ideologies of Ikhwan al-Muslimeen while he was a student of theology at the Al-Azhar University (1966-68) where he actively participated in their programs on campus. He held the position of Professor of Islamic Law at Kabul University after his return and joined the already formed Jamia't-e Islami group. He edited the *Mujalla-e Shariat* [Journal of Islamic Law] until 1974, when he was ousted from the University for his involvement with the Islamic movement. President Daoud's regime ordered his arrest along with other Islamists, but Rabbani succeeded in escaping to the border area, where he attempted to organize the tribes against the regime. He remained underground, in the country, until the Communist coup in 1978, after which he migrated to Pakistan.

During the Soviet War, the Jamia't guerrillas fought in the provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, Qunduz, Kapisa, Samangan, Parwan, Baghlan, and the city of Mazar-e Sharif. The Jamia't party has produced commanders such as Ahmad Shah Mass'ud, Zabullah,31 and Turan Ismael Khan. Mass'ud and Ismael Khan set up a Council of Northern Areas where guerrilla activities were coordinated. Mass'ud used his stronghold in the Panjshir Valley to train guerrillas from other parts of the country. The guerrilla network developed by Mass'ud has been an effective insurgency force in strategy, tactics and leadership qualities.

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27 Mostly Pashtun
28 The power struggle in which thirty Jamia'ati commanders were allegedly killed by the Hizb members in the summer of 1989.
29 I distinguish between pre- 1992 (from the retreat of the Soviets in 1989 to the fall of Najiullah 1992) and post 1992 civil war, fought among the rival factions.
30 Since the fall of the Communist government in 1992 intensifying ethnic rivalry has caused party realignments along ethnic lines.
31 A major Jamia'at commander who inflicted considerable losses on the Soviets who finally paid a large sum to dispose of him in 1985, thus clearing their way into Afghanistan from Central Asia over the Oxus river
Rabbani, head of the transitional government from 1993 to 1996, supports a moderate enforcement of Islamic law. He favors a free, democratic order in society, which would allow even a secularist to participate in the election process. Professor Rabbani has pan-Islamic views, like the rest of the Mujahidin groups. He supported the Iranian revolution due to his belief in the unity of the Islamic Ummah [community]. Rabbani was not opposed to Western economic and military assistance to the Mujahidin via Pakistan, arguing that the Afghans would remain politically independent and capable of determining their own fate.

Hizb-e Islami (Hikmatyar)
Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, the youngest of all the resistance party leaders, is charismatic but widely regarded by his critics as extremist, hard-line and unaccommodating. Since its formation, the Hizb of Hikmatyar has preferred to retain its independence from other groups which in its view are too loosely organized to be effective as guerrilla organizations. Hikmatyar has condemned the role of traditionalist leaders, alleging that they were part of the chaotic practice of the Afghan monarchy. Only under pressure from foreign friends and allies has he cooperated, on a limited basis, with the traditionalists.

In social background, training, and political experience, Hikmatyar is ultra-conservative. He has vowed to establish a strictly Islamic Republic in Afghanistan, similar to the ideological foundations of Khomeini's Iran. Thus, when Hikmatyar accepted the premiership and entered Kabul for the first time in many years, true to his promise, he introduced some conservative social and religious codes. Hizb was an effective resistance organization which operated on several fronts. Hikmatyar maintained a strict centralized party line, exercised extreme caution in the recruitment of cadres and stress the political in maintaining the modern organizational structure of his party. This rigid party structure, political conformity, and an extensive intelligence network not only prevented infiltration by Kabul agents but also helped the Hizb to develop vital sources of information within the civil and military bureaucracy of the Marxist government. For example, the March 1990 coup led by former Defense Minister Shahnawaz Tanai against President Najibullah is reported to have had the cooperation of Hikmatyar's men.

Most of the prominent members of the Hizb are former students of Kabul University who worked with Hikmatyar in the Islamic Youth Organization. Educated youth from the detribalized middle class and defecting Pashtun soldiers and officers have preferred to join Hikmatyar. The availability of the disproportionately large economic and military resources allocated by Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), along with its impressive organizational network and training facilities, made the Hizb an attractive guerrilla party. More than the Jami'at, the Hizb won wide support across tribal, ethnic, and regional lines. During the resistance years, guerrilla activities by the Hizb were concentrated in places such as Kunar, Laghman, Ningrahar, Qunduz, Kabul, Paghmon, Parwan and Kapisa.

The Taliban
Notwithstanding their policy of disarming of all warring factions and implementing Islamic law nationwide, the Taliban have always been demographically a Pashtun movement. While hundreds of Afghan religious students of non-Pashtun background joined them from madaris in Pakistan, the leadership, ethos, and power base of the movement was, from the beginning, Durrani Pashtun, dominated specifically by religious leaders in their forty's from Qandahar and Helmand provinces. Furthermore, during the period of their dramatic advances, the Taliban were consistently portrayed in the media as an unstoppable army backed by jets and armor on its victorious road to Kabul. But the facts tell a different tale.

The speed with which the Taliban burst onto the Afghan political scene stemmed from several factors, none of them military. Basically, the Taliban expanded faster than they themselves believed possible to fill what was in effect a political vacuum in southern Afghanistan. After the fall of Communist President Najibullah in 1992, various Afghan regions fell under the sway of different factions. Meanwhile the Pashtun south, which was tribally fragmented in the best of times, sank into a state of anarchy. While superficially affiliated with parties, local commanders pursued their personal interests of money making and fighting rival groups in order to expand their own influence.

As a result, Qandahar was divided among three major warlords. They exploited travelers at highway and extortion was a daily occurrence. Naturally, these acts gave rise to a deep rooted popular anger everywhere and also alienated some important

Hikmatyar is from the Ghilzai Pashtun tribes, who have traditionally been rivals of the Durrani Pashtun rulers
The new codes included the adoption of traditional dress for men and women and obligatory observance of prayers during the working day
Hikmatyar recruited predominantly from the Pashtuns residing in NWFP camps in Pakistan. With the rise of the Taliban who also attracted many young men from the camps, Hikmatyar’s fresh recruits at training camps almost dried up.
business and religious figures in Quetta and Qandahar. These traders generously supported the Taliban’s campaign to open the roads. Moreover, in a deeply religious culture, the Taliban’s own religious prestige and the simplicity of their objectives, coupled with their position as religious students, and a strong endorsement from the Ulema, have further heightened their appeal.

**Junbesh-e Milli**

A former Communist who is also perhaps the only Afghan leader with a taste for exquisitely tailored suits, flashy ties and whiskey, General ‘Abdul Rashid Dostum is receiving delegations from Kabul, Teheran, Panjshir and Islamabad, all wanting him to support their cause. However, Dostum has preferred, so far, not to reveal many cards and remain independent from any group, at least militarily until he is sure that negotiations with an aggressor will not bear fruit. “Mr. King-maker” can afford to do just that. With a war-experienced force of predominately Uzbaks, backed by a sizable array of fighter-planes, at his command, Dostum has the means to become the deciding player if he were to dive fully into the fray.

Dostum rose to prominence as a result of the most important security problem Najibullah’s government had after the Soviet withdrawal: how to guard the major roads and economically strategic facilities and resources, especially the natural gas fields in northern Afghanistan. The roads, including the strategic Salang Pass, link the south and Kabul to Central Asia. After 1989, with the Soviets gone, President Najibullah no longer had sufficient loyal troops or party members to defend his government. Consequently, he turned to the ethnic militias to protect the border areas. General Dostum, whose militia guarded the natural gas fields and the roads along the predominately Uzbak region around Mazar-e Sharif, became increasingly influential.

Dostum’s forces, in contrast to most were not solely composed of any one traditional local ethnic group. Most members of Dostum’s militia were Uzbak, but the militia’s name referred to an area, and Dostum recruited from all the local ethnic groups. As Dostum’s power grew, he married the daughter of a Popalzai khan [Durrani Pashtun].

Dostum’s militia was the only force big and effective enough to be considered a full division. Around 1988, the Uzbak militia was organized into the Fifty-third Division which bypassed the Ministry of Defense and reported directly to President Najibullah. By 1991 it reported about forty thousand armed men. Jauzjanis played a decisive role as the regime’s only truly mobile reserve force, being the only one capable of aggressive offense operations. The Jauzjanis were no longer under the control of Najibullah not only in the north but even in Kabul. By then, the number of armed militia-men was estimated at 60,000 to 70,000, which was double the size of the regular army.

The regime’s continued survival depended solely on its control of the roads leading to the north, which were at the time under the protection of the Jauzjani and Ismaili militias. This link broke in January 1992, around the time when Russia cut support for Najibullah’s government and the Afghan economy was falling into an sustained hyper-inflation. President Najibullah decided he had better cut corners. He warned Dostum, whom he suspected of padding his ranks with nonexistent recruits, that he would decrease the amount of salary funds.

Furthermore, because Najibullah could no longer rule by buying loyalties with foreign aid, he turned to the last option historically available to the Afghan rulers: the ethnic card. President Najibullah tried to exert influence over the northern supply routes by calling for unity among Pashtun military officers against the Uzbak militia. The end result was the fall of Najibullah and the takeover of Afghanistan by the resistance parties.

By the middle of 1993, Dostum had combined local militias, along with the regime’s garrisons from northern cities from Maimana to Pul-e Khumri, with a northern armed force of 120,000 men. Because he could offer paid jobs, Dostum attracted even Pashtun military officers including some Khalqis from the southern regions. In addition, guerrilla commanders of various parties also joined Dostum’s newly formed Junbish-e Milli [National Movement]. Dostum’s firm control of airfields, roads, and fuel depots (replenished by his Central Asian friends) kept his men mobile, which in turn gave him access and influence in the northern regions.

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35“Dostum Plays King-maker in Afghanistan”; Fahd Husain; NATION, 12/31/95
36Jauzjani Militia; also, 53rd Division
37Who had retreated north after their forts were taken by the resistance factions, following the collapse of the Communist regime in 1992.
Dostum has created a political sphere for himself as the only powerful personality who supports secularism and regional autonomy. Former President Babrak Karmal took up residence in Mazar-e Sharif under his protection for some time. Karmal was also the person who helped Dostum organize his Junbish party.

Moreover, due to the secure atmosphere of the north, the United Nations moved its major office in Afghanistan to Mazar-e Sharif from Kabul in August 1992. Seven countries also established consulates there: Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Turkmanistan, and Tajikistan. Thus, Dostum’s boast that he has more active diplomatic missions than Kabul is not unfounded. In 1992 he visited Uzbekistan, Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia where he was welcomed by top-ranking government officials. Mazar also became a focal point of an expanding local trade with the recently independent Central Asian states. It seems that since 1992 all roads including those from Islamabad and Tehran, are leading to Mazar-e Sharif, the headquarters of General Dostum, who raised his international profile further by collaborating with the United Nations’ High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in a voluntary repatriation of Tajiki refugees that began in May 1993.

In early 1996 former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto flew directly from Tehran to Uzbekistan to meet with Dostum. It is said that Uzbekistan is Dostum’s vital connection, his source of power and command. For some time it seemed that Pakistan had an edge over Iran in relation to Dostum. It now appears, however, that Iran might be talking to the Uzbek General about reconciliation with fragmented Afghanistan.

Uzbaks constitute the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, behind the Pashtuns and Tajiks. Afghan watchers agree that so long as two of the three ethnic groups are united, Afghanistan can never break up: such a fate would only arise if all three decided to seek their fortunes independently. The biggest concern for foreign interests (especially Pakistan) has been to maintain influence on at least two of the three groups. With Rabbani, Mass’ud and the Tajiks openly hostile towards Pakistan, it is thus very important that Dostum be kept on board. Pashtuns have traditionally sided with Pakistan as they share a geographical proximity and economic dependence. Also, Pakistan, has a large Pathan minority with considerable influence in the government. These same politicians are promoting the Taliban inside the government. For similar reasons, former President Zia al-Haq openly supported the Afghan Mujahidin during the 1980’s to win the vote of the right wing and the Pathans.

Entertaining the idea of an autonomous Afghan government, Dostum was strongly advised by all northern neighboring states, especially Uzbekistan, to abstain from such dangerous ambitions. He finally renounced his previous separatist rhetoric and promised support for a united, although decentralized, Afghanistan. However, no Kabul government has truly exercised real jurisdiction over Dostum’s northern regions. He collected customs at Hairatan Port and did not deliver them to Kabul; nor were his forces at any time under the command of the Defense Ministry. It remains to be seen how sincere Dostum is regarding a unified Afghanistan.

Superficially, Dostum was making anti-Rabbani statements for a time, which made Pakistan extremely enthusiastic. But these friendly attitudes towards Pakistan did not result in an offer of support to the Taliban which would set Dostum directly against Rabbani or Mass’ud. Despite his alliance with Mass’ud and Khalili in the SCCIRA, the Uzbek general is talking with Pakistan. In mid-October 1996, in Mazar-e Sharif, Dostum received Nasirullah Babar, Interior Minister of Pakistan, and a delegation of the Taliban, to discuss cooperation. In the past, Dostum has shown that he is capable of suddenly changing sides. Although Dostum’s men are fighting against the Taliban on two fronts (Salang tunnel, north of Kabul, and the northwestern Bodghis province), he is keeping his best men in the north. Mass’ud, too, is aware of this, and has kept his men cautiously away from General Dostum’s troops.

38Supreme Coordination Council
FOREIGN FRIENDS

Hands that rock
Since the Soviet military intervention, regional and international interests have become important factors in the internal dynamics of Afghanistan. Much of this is evident in the client-patron relationship between the Afghan factions and foreign powers. A significant part of the foreign intrusion into Afghanistan is rooted in, and resulting from, Afghanistan's own internal instability. The quest for power, control of territory, and eventual political legitimacy compelled the Afghan factions to seek foreign patronage, at the expense of some freedom to act independently. Among the regional states, Iran and Pakistan were greatly affected by the Afghan situation and, in return, influenced the politics of the resistance against the rule of the Communists and their cronies.

Pakistan
Pakistan played a major role, not only in mobilizing international support for the Afghan resistance in the 1980's, but also in arming and training the guerrillas. Why was Pakistan willing to take risks to complicate its situation with the Soviets? There are two explanations: first, the decision to intervene was influenced by the domestic politics of Pakistan; and second, it was related to the widely-circulated belief that geopolitical destabilization in the region might be caused by the Soviets military action against Afghanistan.

The military regime of General Zia al-Haq was isolated after he executed former Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in April 1979. At the same time, the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan coincided with the Islamic Revolution in Iran. These three events caused a major change in the security relations of Southwest Asia. Pakistan's willingness to play the role of a front line state in matters concerning Afghanistan seemed, from a US policy perspective, to compensate somewhat for the loss of Iran. Cooperating with the US, General Zia benefited in two ways: first, he strengthened his support base among the civil and military establishments by bargaining for US economic and military assistance; second, his strong support for the Afghan resistance appeased some of the conservative religious and political parties, as well as other influential groups (such as the Pathans) within the state hierarchy. The resultant economic growth was a critical factor in hedging the Zia regime against the democratic forces in Pakistan.

On the other hand, the active military involvement of the Soviet Union in support of a narrow-based regime increasingly hostile to Pakistan presented high level security problems. Sandwiched between India and Communist Afghanistan in the 1980's, Pakistan feared a coordinated attack from both enemies. To avoid the dangers from a stable proxy regime in Afghanistan, Pakistan sought to destabilize, and thus disintegrate, Afghanistan.

The most critical factor supporting Pakistan's decision to upgrade the capacity of the guerrillas was the security commitment and military assistance it received from the US. Islamabad counter-balanced the Soviet threat through a variety of means. First, the Soviet invasion encouraged geopolitical destabilization in Southwest Asia, with Pakistan now emerging as the center of a US-sponsored strategic consensus in the region. This deal enabled Pakistan to obtain economic and military assistance in order to modernize Pakistan's own armed forces, which were in a primitive state. Pakistan's security was further enhanced by the creation of a broad coalition of foreign forces backing Islamabad's endeavor as a front line state to expel the Soviets from Afghanistan.

Second, Pakistan supported the Afghan resistance and helped develop a guerrilla-war strategy that challenged Moscow's attempts to strengthen its position in Afghanistan and thus pacify the country. However, the Soviet preoccupation with a war of attrition, resentment at home, and the degree of disgrace in the USSR and internationally due to its military intervention and subsequent failure in Afghanistan prevented Moscow from carrying out military threat against Pakistan.

Finally, Pakistan was careful not to escalate the level of its involvement to a point that would provoke Soviet retaliation. Pakistan accomplished this largely by controlling the technological level of arms distributed to the guerrillas. On the diplomatic front, Pakistan attempted to placate the Soviet Union by responding favorably to the proposal of a political settlement, but maintained its position that Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was a prerequisite to such a settlement.

However, as long as President Najibullah's regime remained in power, Pakistan continued to oppose Soviet occupation via the Afghan resistance. Pakistan also continued to bear the burden of the refugees. Given the historically free character of the tribal...
areas and permeable international borders, Pakistan was in no position either to contain the influx of refugees or to effectively control the movement of the Afghan resistance into and out of Afghanistan.

According to Pakistani sources, beyond the economic cost of feeding the Afghan refugees and the ecological disaster caused by refugee encampment in certain areas, the continued presence of the refugees in Pakistan is a potential threat to social tranquility and political stability. Pakistan itself is a fragmented society, and given the current state of affairs, both political and sectarian, a social conflagration cannot be ruled out. It is virtually impossible to isolate Pakistan’s domestic political conflict from the Afghan factor, at least until a stable government in Afghanistan is formed. Yet the growing resentment against the corrupt Pakistani government might put various combinations of Afghan and Pakistani political elements on a collision course with Islamabad. This is a worst case scenario, but it reminds us that if the Afghan crisis in not settled by the creation of a widely-accepted government enjoying the wider support of all important Afghan resistance factions, there could be serious consequences for Pakistan’s policies and security.

After six years of diplomacy, Undersecretary General of the United Nations Diego Cordovez, on April 14, 1988 succeeded in his mission. In the Geneva accord, signed by the USSR, the USA, Pakistan, and Communist Afghanistan, the Soviets agreed to withdraw all forces from Afghanistan by April 15, 1989, almost a decade after their invasion. As a result, the shift in Soviet policy away from Afghanistan removed the most important reason for US economic and military assistance to Pakistan, and the issue of nuclear proliferation returned to the place of dominance it once occupied on the US-Pakistan bilateral agenda. The US had grown increasingly suspicious of Pakistan’s nuclear program, charging Islamabad with continuing to produce fissionable material in violation of pledges previously made in order to qualify for US economic and military assistance. Ultimately, the US ended its large scale assistance to Pakistan in 1990, when President George Bush refused to endorse the Pakistani case in congress.

Meanwhile, Islamabad saw unlimited opportunities for entering the Newly Independent State [NIS] markets of Central Asia which were equally eager to establish trade and investment links. But without the land routes through Afghanistan, Pakistan may never succeed in realizing its interests in that region. Moreover, many of the Central Asian leaders are recent converts from the Communist party and are committed to a secular approach to modernizing their Muslim societies. They fear that if militant Islamists of the Pashtun ethnic groups, first Hikmatyar and now the Taliban, were to capture power in Afghanistan, the Turkman, Tajik, and Hazara ethnic minorities of Afghanistan might feel threatened and start migrating to Central Asia. Therefore, Pakistan has been told in unequivocal terms that were it to support the establishment of an extreme Islamist government in Afghanistan, it would prevent the growth of friendly relations with Central Asia, another reason why Pakistan denies its support of the Taliban. Furthermore, the Pakistani power structure (president, prime minister and the military) is secretly feeding the growth of any Afghan contingent which would create a stable, friendly government in Kabul. It is interesting to note that the Taliban rose to prominence at around the same time as the Central Asian states became autonomous.

From the beginning of the Afghan resistance movement, Pakistan faced the problem of how to react to the continuing power struggle between Afghanistan’s new leaders. Additionally, moderate leaders such as Dostum and Mass’ud have long resented Pakistan’s generous support of Hikmatyar, and viewed him as the puppet of Pakistan’s ISI, in much the same way they now view Pakistan’s new client, the Taliban.

Ethnic issues further complicate Pakistan’s policy on Afghanistan. The ousted Afghan government was dominated by the Tajik ethnic group. Further fragmentation of the country has already resulted in the formation of localized centers of power where minorities have gained a free hand in their own affairs following the breakdown of central authority. For the first time in Afghan history, ethnic and religious minorities have acquired a real sense of independence. Having gained autonomy and political power, the local lords may never again accept domination by any one ruling ethnic group. Given the current situation, it may be that only a decentralized political order, granting a fair amount of autonomy to the various ethnic groups, can pave the way towards a genuine national reconciliation. Rule by force, however, throws Afghanistan into another round of fighting, but this time the prime objective may be only showing supposed ethnic dominance.

For a better understanding of Pakistan-Taliban relations, a closer look is necessary. Despite Pakistan’s official denial, at least two Pakistani government entities have extended help to the Taliban thus far. First, Pakistan’s Interior Minister Nasirullah Babar is understood to have provided some covert backing to the Taliban in the late Summer 1994. A retired general and major

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39Pashtun tribes are largely settled in NWFP and Quetta

40Pakistan believes that active involvement to promote unification may be judged as undue interference, while indifference to the infighting may cause further fragmentation.
player in Afghanistan’s affairs, who in the mid-1970’s had a considerable influence on Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto’s policy towards Kabul, Babar was a leading advisor to the daughter, Benazir Bhutto. He seems to have found in the Taliban a useful means of opening up the highway from Quetta in Pakistan which passes through Qandahar and Herat, and on to Turkmanistan in Central Asia, thus securing for Pakistan a share in the Central Asian markets.

Initially, some funds and arms began flowing to the Taliban from local businessmen in and around Qandahar. After the fall of Speen Baldak in late 1994, Hikmatyar’s Hizb claimed that the Taliban were supported by artillery fire from the Pakistani side of the border. They were sure of this because when Hizb of Hikmatyar captured the same town from Najibullah’s garrison in late 1980’s, their attack was also backed by Pakistani artillery. By the beginning of 1995, however, support from Babar was being supplemented by financial aid from the military’s ISI Directorate of Lieutenant General Javed Ashraf.

Pakistan Brigadier (Retired) General Karrar Ali Agha, explained in an interview that the ISI felt betrayed by its protégés like Hikmatyar. The disappointment and frustration eventually gave rise to their strategy of creating a fresh, neutral, and independent force which could be used to eliminate the fractious Afghan warlords. According to General Agha this new strategy was probably the brain child of General Asad Durrani, but implemented by General Javed Nasir. This also explains why the Taliban remained confined to a specific Islamic school of thought. While the Taliban were going through the process of being trained and equipped, Javed Nasir abruptly lost his job in 1993. He was succeeded by general Javad Ashraf. According to General Agha, General Durrani’s strategy was abandoned. Because some semblance of stability was attained in Afghanistan after the rapprochement between Hikmatyar and Rabbani, creating another Afghan force was deemed as unnecessary. Deprived of its generous support, the Taliban force fell back on the madaris in Baluchistan, Quetta and NWFP, which are run primarily by the JUI, and they disappeared into oblivion for a time.

Central Asian States
According to Pakistani calculations, the independence of the Central Asian Republics has added a new factor to the vortex of regional power rivalries in which Afghanistan finds itself caught. Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmanistan share, not only borders, but also an ethnic, cultural, and religious affinity with Afghanistan and its peoples.

The political elite in Central Asia perceive Islamist movements in the tri-junction of South, Southwest, and Central Asia, as highly destabilizing to the region. These elite, for the most part the product of the Soviet Communist system, are striving for political identity in order to attract a broader political base. Yet they face growing opposition on the issues of democratic liberties and religious freedom. These players see their legitimacy threatened by the cross-border, transitional Islamic influences emerging from Afghanistan. The former Tajik-Islamic government of Kabul had assured them that it did not intend to align itself with opposition forces in the Central Asian republics, a promise not yet made by the Taliban.41

Many observers speculate that ethnic bonds, with family and blood ties, may push the Uzbak and Tajik minorities of Afghanistan towards their co-nationals across the border if the current power struggle for Afghanistan results in a permanent dominance of the Pashtuns. Such a scenario is far-fetched, however, considering the pride of the Afghans and their history. Before the conquest of Kabul by the Taliban, the Central Asian states played a minimal role in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. This was probably due more to the weak state of their economies and the current difficult process of state building than to any lack of interest in Afghanistan.

Given the fact that the system of roads between Uzbekistan and northern Afghanistan is quite well developed allowing great opportunities for trade, the Central Asian states can be expected to pay increasing attention to political events in Afghanistan. Since the conquest of Kabul by the Taliban (September 27, 1996), a red alert has gone off in the entire former Soviet Union, especially in the five Central Asian states. Chernomerydan, the Prime Minister of Russia, called for a meeting of the five Central Asian presidents in early October in order to build a united front against Taliban aggression. They also announced full support for the Uzbak general, Dostum, and the ousted Kabul government.

On the other hand, a few factors have forced the Central Asian states to look away from Russia in the direction of their Islamic neighbors: first the loosening of economic ties with Russia and other European republics of the former Soviet Union; second, Russia is re-orienting itself entirely towards Western Europe, leaving Central Asia to its own fate; third, much of the Western

41The Taliban are reported (by Alexander Lebed) to have claimed that they want to liberate cities of Samarqand and Bukhara, which are in Uzbekistan.
aid that has been committed to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) has been allocated to European states, mainly Russia and the Ukraine.\footnote{Ukraine is the third biggest receiver of US aid, behind Israel and Egypt, respectively.}

The influence of the Russian trained elite, the Russian language, and a large population of ethnic Russian settlers in Central Asia would complicate any quest to forge historic and cultural ties with the East and South. Also, competition for influence among Central Asian states might emerge as a new source of rivalries among the regional states. Iran and Turkey represent two extremes of the political spectrum and strategic alignments, while Pakistan, another competitor, blends a somewhat moderate Islamic outlook with a more democratic system.

**India**

Although New Delhi strongly decried the involvement of external powers in the region’s security affairs, it maintained a guarded silence over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Officially, it never uttered a word against the atrocities and devastation caused by the Soviet forces. Such silence contrasted greatly with the indignation unequivocally expressed by most developing and western countries over the Soviet occupation.

India’s silence stemmed from three factors: 1) India did not see an advantage in offending Moscow over a situation that did not directly endanger Indian security; 2) India also appeared more worried about implications on the regional balance of power should resistance forces topple the Soviet imposed regime and install a government friendly to Pakistan, therefore New Delhi desired a secular, neutral, and friendly Afghanistan; and 3) India anticipated that a Pakistan drawn into the Soviet-sponsored conflict would be more amenable to New Delhi’s leadership role, or at least would emerge a weaker player in the regional power equation. But by downplaying the Soviet involvement, India found itself neutralized in the major conflict next door. Pakistan, on the other hand emerged as a far more influential regional actor, winning sizable international support. India, from the Taraki regime to the Rabbani regime, had offered technical and economic assistance to the contested Afghan government. Indian interest in the fate of Kabul grew even stronger as the Soviet Union dissolved and Russia re-evaluated its interests.

By condemning the cause of national self-determination, India alienated itself from the anti-government factions in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, India’s obvious military advantage over Pakistan and its greater capacity to sustain a prolonged war may tempt some of the more aggressive Indian leaders to resolve their bitter rivalries by attacking Pakistan with the object of devastating its military capabilities. So far, neither country appears to desire yet another costly war, one perhaps more destructive than the previous ones given the sophisticated weaponry the two sides now possess. Two factors, however, may provoke action. The first is public opinion, which has run far hotter than the relatively cautious statements of government leaders. The second is the upsurge of fundamentalist Hindu elements since the 1991 Indian elections. A trigger factor may be a drastic change in the strategy and alignment of Kabul towards Pakistan, or the success of either the Defense Council of Afghanistan or the Taliban in gaining control of all of Afghanistan. On the whole, Indian policy towards Afghanistan is fundamentally constant: to support those elements which oppose Pakistan or those that are opposed by Pakistan.

**Iran**

Tehran has repeatedly stated that unity among all the Afghan factions is necessary if there is to be an effective political alternative for Afghanistan. Although Tehran’s support was mainly confined to the Shi’ite factions during the Soviet-Afghan War, it eventually lent its support to the former Tajik Kabul government, and lately the Supreme Coordination Council for the Defense of Afghanistan (SCCDA). More and more, Iran is trying to play a bigger role in regional politics, thus competing with other regional actors such as Pakistan, India, Russia and Turkey.

After its disengagement from the war with Iraq, Tehran stepped up aid to its Afghan clients and paid increasing attention to their affairs. Iran’s efforts have resulted in remarkable success: in March 1990, eight Shi’ite parties met together in Tehran for the first time to develop a common political and military strategy and formed an alliance under Hizb-e Wahdat [Unity Party]. On the other side of the spectrum, the lack of agreement concerning the degree of Shi’ite representation in the interim government prevented Wahdat from joining the Pakistan-backed interim government in exile in 1990. The Pakistan based parties reportedly refused to accept twenty-five percent Shi’a representation in the Afghan Shura,\footnote{The consultative assembly that elected the interim government} alleging that the given figure overstated the percentage of the Shi’a population of Afghanistan. Wahdat and Iran rejected a fifteen percent Shi’a representation proposed by the Shura.
In addition to finding friction with the traditional, non-revolutionary Islam of the majority of the Sunni parties, Iran never felt at ease with the flow of US support to such Afghan resistance parties. Deprived of Soviet backing, the economically desperate Najibullah regime took advantage of Tehran's concern, indicating willingness to grant autonomy to the Shi'ite parties in return for Iranian support. Presently, Iran's growing Afghan refugee problems in addition to the threat of the hard-line Sunni Militia which is backed by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States, has forced Iran to protect itself by supporting non-Pashtun moderate leaders such as Mass'ud and Dostum.

**THE UNITED NATIONS' EFFORTS**

The current power-struggle has raised concerns over the widening of an already great ethno-linguistic rift between the Taliban-dominated Pashtu-speaking south and the Dari [Persian] speaking north, the front line being immediately outside Kabul. This trend is exacerbated by the crumbling resistance parties as ethnic loyalties replace traditional political allegiances. The worst-case scenario involves the Pashtun Islamist Hikmatyar throwing in his lot with the Taliban, while the northern warlord Dostum and his current allies, Mass'ud and Khalili, attempt, to fight for ethnic/linguistic superiority.

Strapped for cash, undermined by chronic and mutual mistrust among the Afghan protagonists, and repeatedly overwhelmed by events, the UN's efforts to mediate in this situation have produced little basis for confidence. Special Envoy Mahmud Mistiri's attempts to persuade former President Burrhan al-Din Rabbani to step down in favor of a mechanism for the transition of power to a 'broad-based' government were frustrated by the near impossibility of establishing such a mechanism in the first place, let alone ensuring its survival afterwards. With UN credibility at a low, growing concern among some Western governments over the ongoing rift in Afghanistan stimulated a revived peace initiative, possibly resulting in a new UN leadership effort.

Exhausted from his fruitless efforts, Mahmud Mistiri resigned his post due to medical reasons. Consequently an air of pessimism fell on the people of Afghanistan everywhere; many losing all hopes for a united Afghanistan. The resulting UN doubt concerning Afghanistan, and the dislike among member-states for dead-end missions, left Afghanistan abandoned to its fate. Shortly thereafter, the UN offered the monumental task of UN Secretary General's Special Envoy on Afghanistan to a German diplomat, Dr. Norbert Holl. Mr. Holl, in a press conference, quickly made it clear that he was not over optimistic as he is a professional and has seen crises from which he has learned his lessons. He further added that, the Mistiri peace plan will be followed but not in the same approach. A desire to formulate a neutral transitory mechanism was expressed by Dr. Holl. When asked about his knowledge of Afghanistan, he referred to his active involvement with some of the 60,000 Afghans living in Germany stating that Afghans cannot deceive him because he knows enough about them.

What remains certain is that, after five years of war for control of Kabul, the masters of the capital will hardly consider surrendering the city to the vagaries of a UN settlement. While paying superficial lip-service to the UN mediation, all factions are aware that any broad-based government cobbled together by the UN would inevitably be fragile and chronically vulnerable to the machinations of foreign-backed member factions.

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44Dr. Mistiri seemed to have favored the return of the former king, Mohammad Zahir, from exile in Italy.
45A.F. 7-8, 1996
OVERVIEW

Reintroducing peace and normalcy in a country that has suffered the destruction and horror of a foreign proxy war lasting over nine years, followed by a seemingly endless period of civilian suffering, may not be easy, or even possible. Complicating this issue is the destruction of the traditional power structure and the emergence of localized centers of authority, often antagonistic towards each other.

Ironically, the Afghan civilians (who as a group have suffered the most devastating effects of the war) are not only left out of the political process, but are also held hostage to the aggression between competing parties. Having lost the traditional state of equilibrium where the position of minority groups was more clearly defined, each major faction is independently attempting a unilateral solution to the national crisis while claiming the support of the majority. Given this as the current situation, the future of Afghanistan certainly looks bleak.

Stubbornly protecting the autonomous status of their parties, Afghan leaders have completely ignored the vital strategic linkages between a centralized political organization and coordinated military operations. The politics of the resistance were characterized by bitter discord rather than cooperation. In addition, a dismal organizational structure and the absence of charismatic national personalities also help to explain the fractious nature of the parties. One should not, however, forget the influence of foreigners in the dynamics of the resistance parties. Furthermore, social forces and the circumstances surrounding the evolution of the Afghan resistance have given rise to differences between the opposition groups which may roughly be characterized as doctrinal, political, and personal.

The doctrinal distinctions between the Islamist and the traditionalist political parties not only project different images of the future Afghan state but also generate mutual hostility. Largely due to their quest for political recognition and access to financial patronage, the leaders of various groups have maintained their independence. Such a policy was not without economic dividends as seen during the war of resistance when weapons and foreign economic aid were allocated to independent groups for distribution among guerrillas and their tribal clients.

A second category of differences focuses mainly on political matters. Social class, origin, and Islamist/traditionalist inclinations have fostered contrasting views on politics, state and society. Divergent political attitudes in the resistance parties were, to some degree, carried over from their social class bias and the political roles they had played before 1978. The Islamists, having historically been on the fringes of political power, represent the social ethos of a rising educated middle class that cuts across regional, tribal and ethnic affiliations. The major purpose of their political program, though less salient during the war, has been to end the political domination of the Afghan aristocracy along with Islamizing Afghan society. On the other hand, the traditionalist and nationalist leaders emerged from the privileged class and had a natural interest in aligning with forces that would preserve the social and political status quo. The utter destruction of the old social order by the continuing war, and the different Afghan reality that has since emerged may have influenced their political objectives, but the traditionalists are still suspected by the Islamists of nurturing the desire to restore the old social hierarchy and political institutions. Such plans reinforce mistrust among the Afghan factions.

The third category of differences can be explained in terms of personality clashes and rivalry for personal recognition and leadership. Much of the quarreling among the resistance groups is a reflection of personal antagonisms, which are generally attributable to the intensity of their political ambition and religious ideology. The competition for political dominance has encouraged local commanders who were loosely aligned with the Pakistan based political parties to outflank each other. Treacherous commanders often commit sabotage, assaults, and ambushes before switching loyalty to a rival group. As a result, squabbles among the resistance parties, which had been sidelined to some extent by the presence of the Soviet military and upstaged by the unexpected survival of President Najibullah's regime, became increasingly frequent and violent.

Although respect for the Peshawar Accord would have paved the way to a peaceful transition, the presence of the Uzbek militia in Kabul and their support by the guerrillas of Ahmad Shah Mass'ud led to bloody clashes with the guerrillas of Hikmatyar. This resulted in hundreds of deaths and the expulsion of Hikmatyar from his positions in Kabul. Thus the two most organized parties, with similar views on Islamism became locked in a bitter conflict.

46 The Durrani tribe in particular
47 The return of exiled king, Mohammad Zahir, is one such complication
48 The first major round of such battles occurred over the control of Kabul, when all factions rushed to fill the power vacuum left by the sudden fall of Dr. Najibullah in April 1992
The fight for Kabul continued between the Supreme Coordination Council (SCC) on one side and the Rabbani-Sayyaf alliance on the other until May 1995, when the Taliban suddenly appeared at the gates of Kabul. The Taliban’s advance on Kabul ultimately knocked Hikmatyar out of contention. He was out of the picture until 1996 when he accepted his old position as the Prime Minister of Afghanistan. Hikmatyar’s move was seen as the spark that would ignite a peace process in Afghanistan, especially by the West and the UN. It was hoped that the joint Pashtun-Tajik government would win a broader legitimacy for the government and eventually the Afghan crisis would be resolved. It was not long thereafter that the Taliban seized Kabul, thus eliminating such a solution.

The question now is: How inclined are Afghan civilians to support the efforts of the warring factions if they decide to plunge the country into a purely ethnic war? Having suffered unimaginable devastation and dislocation caused by proxy wars, the Afghan population is no longer enthusiastic about military solutions. They are desperate to end uncertainty and restore peace, but they find themselves torn among the competing groups. Unfortunately, there is no independent institution with enough credibility in civil society to be able to disengage such fiercely antagonistic adversaries, particularly ethnic ones. The outcome of the conflict among the factions will depend partly on which side succeeds in forging organized links with society and convincing the Afghans of its ideals’ merit. The more prolonged this process, the more tragic the situation for this war-ravaged country.

Continuous conflict has spawned new social and political forces. The most important societal change has been the strengthening of ethnic identity. Non-Pashtun minority groups have acquired a greater sense of empowerment by establishing autonomous administrative networks. The military power of the Uzbek militia has entertained speculations of a de facto parallel government forming in Northern Afghanistan. With the emergence of Mazar-e Sharif as an important center of political and military power, northern Afghanistan and its 50,000 plus Uzbek coalition cannot be ignored in any future power arrangement.

Meanwhile, all the neighboring states have conflicting interests in Afghanistan, mainly due to cross-border ethnic ties and political interests. For example, the Pashtuns living in the eastern and southern parts of Afghanistan have tribal, ethnic, and family ties with the Pashtuns of Baluchistan and NWFP in Pakistan. It would be impossible for Pakistan to establish or maintain any degree of stable influence over its Pathans. There are two reasons for this: first, the Pashtuns and Pathans are more strongly divided along tribal and political lines than any other ethnic group; second, and more importantly, the Pathans’ identification with Afghan and militant nationalistic sentiments would complicate any attempt by Pakistan’s ruling elite to dominate them. Conversely, their constant infighting and common desire to Create Pashtunistan might continue to drag Pakistan into their struggles. It is difficult to foretell the outcome of the ethnic and political rivalries among the foreign sponsored Afghan groups, but it is certain that Pakistan would play a large role in any settlement process.

Today’s ethnic conflict reflects the seemingly divided and suppressed subtext of Afghan history. One should note the significance of the rule of Bacha-e Saqaw, the first Tajik ever to rule Kabul. Also of importance is the Tajik mother of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan who presented problems in the Amir’s consolidation of the country from among his step-brothers who controlled important provinces. It is apparent through this analysis that the roots of ethnic conflict run deep in Afghan history. And now those sentiments have been magnified by the emergence of localized centers of power where minorities have gained a

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49 On June 26, 1996 Hikmatyar was sworn in as Afghanistan’s new prime minister.
50 The proposed return of the former king, Mohammad Zahir Khan, sounds reasonable on paper alone. It is doubtful that any of the warlords would relinquish power in his favor, regardless of his role as a unifying figure.
51 Balkh province.
52 There are also Tajiks and Pashtuns in Dostum’s army.
53 Mainly Sindis and Panjabis.
54 An independent Sovereign country for all Pashtuns and Pathans.
55 In 1929 - for nine months.
new found autonomy. The inevitable questions to ask are: will the Taliban consolidate Afghanistan under the rule of one single ethnic group? Will the country survive geographically intact? Will the ethnic groups be able to forget the pains of the civil war? This all depends on the desire of the Afghan people to choose to live under one name: the Afghans. The determining factor will be the meaning that the term “Afghan” will come to signify. The desperation of Afghans is best expressed in the words of a rocket victim in a Kabul hospital, who cried: “Allah, Allah. Grant us mercy.”

In short
In the political arena it was practical for General Dostum to play the spectator watching the Taliban and the former government battle it out Kabul. In this exhaustive battle, Dostum unequivocally sought an equilibrium of opposing forces, in order to maintain the status quo. In the past, while the government and the Taliban were dead-locked in a fight for Kabul, much attention was diverted from the Uzbak general, who carved a strong niche for himself earned a profit by taxing traders from the emerging Central Asian markets. Now that oil has been found in Turkmanistan, both Iran and Pakistan are struggling to get involved in connecting pipelines which would ideally pass through Afghanistan to bring oil to the Gulf.

Dostum fosters the thought of a supreme seat in Afghan politics. In his areas he is now called ‘Padshah’, a title synonymous with king; a dream that will only come to Dostum if and when Afghanistan splits into North and South. He has already planted the seeds for such a day by marrying the daughter of a Durrani Khan and commanding a joint army of Tajiks, Uzbaks and Pashtuns. Furthermore, the economic boom in his region, and the active foreign missions in his base of Mazar-e Sharif adds to his legitimacy. It is unwise to overlook the ambitions of this Uzbak prince, who by playing a conservative game, has so far avoided the mistakes of his mentor, Babrak Karmal.

While, the Rabbani-Mass’ud group continues to claim attainable legitimacy internationally, domestically they are attempting to broaden their base by negotiating with politically amenable elements. Mass’ud, on the other hand, is pursuing a war of attrition against the Taliban. Despite deep chasms of separation among all the country’s ethnic groups a sense of shared nationhood also runs deep. It is this which may mitigate alarmist scenarios of a break-away Pashtunistan (South Afghanistan) or Bokhtar (North Afghanistan). If Afghans do question their Afghan identity and their national unity it would be a truly a humiliating strike in the face of Afghan pride.

In the immediate future, the most decisive factor in this fluid solution will be the solidarity of the Taliban themselves. Be they a social movement or a political party, the Taliban have gathered much momentum over the course of their rapid and impressive expansion; yet they lack internal cohesion. Whether such a movement can hold together in the face of a major defeat and establish viable and sustainable political control over the tribally fragmented South remains to be seen. The Supreme Alliance will be betting that they cannot. One thing however is certain: that the Taliban represent the last attempt of the Durranis to regain a lost glory.

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Former President Babrak Karmal, 67, died on December 3, 1996 in Moscow hospital due to liver cancer.
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**Terminology**

**Madrasah-** A religious school. These types of schools are very common in rural areas. The basic curriculum is studying the Quran and the Hadiths (Traditions of the Prophet), as well as mathematics, and philosophy.

**Madaris-** Plural form of Madrasah

**Mujahid-** One who is active in Jihad (holy war).

**Mujahidin-** Plural form of Mujahid. In my paper, this term refers to resistance fighters who were battling the Soviet Union only (from 1978-1989).

**Talib-** A student of a madrasah.

**Tullab-** Plural form of Talib. I refer to those students who are not part of the Taliban movement.

**Taliban-** Members of the Taliban group. In Arabic Taliban is the dual form of Talib.

**Jami’at-** I refer to the Afghan resistance faction of Jami’at-e Islami. In Arabic in means a group.

**Jama’at-** I refer to the Pakistani Islamic group that Afghan Islamist groups stemmed from it. In Arabic it means a crowd.

**Pashtun-** Refers to those Pashtuns who live/lived within the borders of modern Afghanistan.

**Pathan-** Refers to Pashtuns who are/were living within the borders of Pakistan.