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NATIONALISM IN AFGHANISTAN

The theme of "Nationalism after Colonialism" as far as Afghanistan is concerned begs many questions: with the national or patriotic idea so weak and undeveloped, it arguably makes more sense to analyze rival ideas of the nation held by the country's different ethnic groups than some hypothetical all-embracing Afghan nationalism. When did the era of colonialism (neo-colonialism would be more apt) end—or, indeed, begin? Quite as much as foreign colonialism, was not internal colonialism by Pashtun tribal elites the major feature of development of nationalism in modern Afghanistan?

This chapter argues that neo-colonial domination of Afghanistan by Britain, and later by the USSR, went in tandem with a form of internal colonialism by a Pashtun ruling class over the country's many ethnic minorities: Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Turcomen, Aimaqs, Nuristanis, Baluchis, and others. The process of "nation building under conditions of independence" continues at the present time, with inter-ethnic relations fundamentally altered by the changes in power relations brought about during warfare since 1978.

Some specific features of the development of nationalism in Afghanistan have contributed to the present crisis. Two decades of destruction from warfare in Afghanistan have been compounded by the failure of rival leaders to create any stable form of government. What fragile unity the country used to have before the civil war began in 1978 has been steadily eroded. At this writing, the Afghans are neither one people nor one political community, while the state itself is broken-backed and the country divided between two rival governments: a Taliban-ruled state competes for control of northern regions under mutually rival warlords. Ethnic, tribal, and sectarian divisions have worsened and further fragmented the country.

THE NATIONAL IDEA

In modern Afghanistan, the national or patriotic idea remained very weak and undeveloped, altogether lacking appeal or influence except in a small and unrepresentative educated urban, literate class whose members were often in important respects deracinéand in culture cut off from the mass of the rural or tribal population. Afghanistan's rural population lived for the most part in remote areas and had very restricted hori-

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zons and minimal political consciousness. In the nature of things, nationalism could not exert its peculiar ideological appeal until the majority of Afghanistan's population were integrated into the collective life of society.[1]

Although the modernization of Afghan society had made considerable progress from the 1950s, its impact was restricted almost entirely to the capital, Kabul, and even there mainly within the educated elite. In practice, even the small educated class was itself deeply divided along ethnic lines, with Pashtuns often claiming to represent the entire population, and non-Pashtuns bitterly resenting the virtual monopoly of power and pretensions of the Pashtun elite. In Kabul and the few large towns, the elite and urban middle class were subject to a process of Persianization of speech and culture.[2]

Just how wide the mental gulf was between the relatively liberal city and the conservative-minded countryside has been revealed starkly in the undeniable popular following gained by the Taliban movement in 1996, upholding the most diehard and reactionary Afghan fundamentalist views on organizing society, which have (at least, temporarily) reversed all the social and educational reforms introduced over this century.

For all these cautious changes and reforms, the political system of modern Afghanistan remained in essence one of dominance by a tribal aristocracy. The place of the Mohammadzai family as emirs and later kings of Afghanistan was crucial to the development of nationalism. The special status and prestige of King Mohammad Zahir Shah somehow survived; he reigned from 1933 until 1973 (and still lives as an exile in Rome).

It accounts for the continued unrealistic (and rather pathetic) faith held both among the educated elite and ordinary people in the ability of the old former king to bring peace to the country. The fact that today millions of Afghans firmly believe that Zahir Shah alone can unify the country, a full-quarter century after the 1973 coup that displaced the king and declared a republic, demonstrates the intimate linkage among modernization, nationalism, and the institution of monarchy.

LANGUAGE ISSUES

Afghanistan's ruling elite was Pashtun by descent, but in language its members by and large had become absorbed into the Persian-speaking atmosphere of the court. The 1964 Constitution of Afghanistan, introduced with the "New Democracy," named two official languages: Pashto and Dari, the name given to Afghan Farsi or Persian. (The name Dari had been adopted and insisted on as the correct term essentially to differentiate the Afghan form of Persian from that of Iran, which is more prestigious and much more productive in publications.)

In reality, Dari, not Pashto, always served as the lingua franca of the country as a whole. Language was to remain a deeply contentious and divisive issue. An official drive to make Pashto more viable as the national language by creating one standard language instead of numerous regional dialects led to the creation in 1937 of a Pashto Academy (Pashto Tolaney), which went to extreme lengths in inventing new compound Pashto words to replace Persian and other foreign words in common use. But the state-led drive failed to make Pashto in any real sense a competitor to Persian.

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This was due not only to the sheer difficulty involved in learning Pashto as a second language, compared to the simplicity of Persian (Dari) grammar, but to general animosity felt against the Pashtun political dominance. A clear sense of cultural superiority was (and, indeed, still is) often expressed by members of Tajik, Turkic, and other non-Pashtun groups. As the Polish linguistics researcher Jadwiga Pstrusinska noted:

> one often heard it said that Pashto is a barbaric language, spoken by primitive people, sounding like a donkey braying, while Dari is spoken by civilized people and is sweet to hear.[3]

However, repeated attempts were made to foster the growth and spread of Pashto, officially specified as the key language for government. Persian-language newspapers were obliged to publish pages in Pashto. Official patronage of Pashto was systematically attempted—but abjectly failed—during the decade 1953–63, when Mohammed Daoud Khan (a prince and cousin of the king) was prime minister. According to Louis Dupree, an American anthropologist resident in Kabul:

> Some non-Pashto-speaking high-ranking officials found it necessary to have clerks translate their Farsi communications into Pashto for transmission to another office. The recipient, often a non-Pashto speaker as well, handed the report to an assistant for translation back into Farsi. The scheme collapsed in a welter of translation and retranslation.[4]

ORIGINS OF THE STATE

Most of present-day Afghanistan has been incorporated into the ailing Safavid empire of Iran, based in Isfahan, or the Mughal empire based in Delhi. It had no political identity of its own, and regions of Afghanistan had been at various times ruled or fought over by rival Safavid, Mughal, and Uzbek Shaibanid rulers. After the assassination of Nadir Shah in 1747, his empire disintegrated, and the eastern half was taken over by his Afghan general Ahmad Khan Abdali (Durrani), with its new capital in Kandahar. This successor regime proved ephemeral, and it failed to keep the loyalty of the tribes on which its power was based or to develop further.[5]

Like most countries of the Middle East, Afghanistan was a congerie of different ethnic communities, linguistic groups, and tribes. State borders were essentially fluid, being dependent ultimately on the current rulers' power or weakness. The Afghan emirs lost Punjab, Peshawar, and other Pashtun southern lands to the Sikhs before British power extended there. To the north of the Amu Darya River, the emirs lost Panjdeh district to Russia in 1885, and would certainly have lost more territories to Russian colonization in Central Asia if not for British backing at that time.

The lack of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity of the country was reflected in the varied names attached to it. Although to the British and other Western foreigners even before 1880 the country had been known as "Afghanistan," its own inhabitants traditionally never identified it as such. Instead, numerous other terms were in general use: the northern half was usually called "Khurasan" or "Zabulistan" as well as "Turkistan," while the southern part was identified as "Kabul" or "Kabulistan." Within Afghanistan, the term "Afghan" was always specifically identified with Pashtuns and Pashtun dominance. The usage of the term "Afghanistan" came about naturally enough, because 19th-century British writers approached the country from the south

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where, of course, Pashtun tribes were settled, while Pashtun rulers were also dominant politically.

As with all tribally based peoples, theories and traditions about their race and descent have been extremely important. Traditional ideas about Afghanistan's past have concentrated on genealogies and "ancestor worship" rather than history writing as such. Naturally, it is oral history and preserved traditions and legends that represent the essence of history among the Pashtuns and all the tribal peoples of Afghanistan, almost all of whom were non-literate.

Afghan traditions claim descent of Afghan tribes back to the legendary Kais, supposedly the first of this race to be converted to Islam by the Prophet Muhammad himself in Medina. Afghan claims to have Jewish ancestry further dignified the lineage, as the British historian H. W. Bellew wrote:

> The Afghans consider themselves a distinct race, and style themselves "Bani Israel" or "Children of Israel," tracing their descent in a direct line from Saul the Banjamite, King of Israel.[6]

The term "Afghan" gradually became synonymous with Pashto-speakers in general, while non-Pashtun inhabitants of Afghanistan, then as now, commonly used their respective identifying labels of race and language (i.e., Uzbek, Tajik, Farsiwan) or of region (i.e., Herati, Panjsheri, Kohistani, Badakhshani). The diverse ethnic groups have their own distinct legends of origin, yet some of these tales of origin overlap, spreading far beyond the present boundaries of Afghanistan. Thus, the Turkic peoples living north of the Hindu Kush take pride in variations of Geser, the Mongol epic, while Uzbek epics retell the history of the Golden Horde, the khanates of Turkistan, and heroes of the epoch of their conquests and power, from Alpamysh on.

The growth of historical awareness among Afghanistan's minorities can be illustrated in the case of the Hazaras, one of the larger minorities and a people usually claimed to be of mixed Turco-Mongol origins speaking an old form of Persian.[7] The Hazaras adopted a legend or folk memory of being descended from a Mongol military garrison sent by Genghis Khan. Some of the Hazara-educated elite (especially those in diaspora living in Quetta, Pakistan) have recently fostered a virtual cult of Genghis Khan as a "world conqueror" and proudly claim him as their very own great ancestor.

There are numerous cases of events from much more recent history entering into popular consciousness, such as memories of the basmachi uprisings in the 1920s in Soviet Central Asia among the Turkic and Tajik descendants of immigrants or refugees from the USSR who fled to Afghanistan. In Kohistan, for example, a recorded Tajik folktale had as its hero Habibullah II, so-called Bacha Saqqao, the Tajik adventurer of humble origin who ruled Kabul briefly after the fall of King Amanullah in 1929.[8]

Unlike most states of Asia and the Middle East in the last century, Afghanistan escaped direct colonial rule by European powers, yet in many respects its development was marked by foreign influence and power. For Afghans, the freedom of their land is due solely to the unique courage of their ancestors fighting against the most powerful empire of the time. There is indeed an element of truth in this thesis, but for objective historians, other, more prosaic reasons are advanced to explain their continued independence:

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Afghanistan occupied a geographical belt at which the dynamics of Russian expansion and British expansion met. Neither Britain nor Russia could have gained and solidified control there without risking a major war.[9]

The borders of modern Afghanistan were a classic product of "frontier engineering," demarcated by British and Russian military teams in a long process at the end of the 19th century. The Wakhan corridor was created so as to divide neatly Russian from British territories in the Pamirs, while the Durand Line divided Pashtun borderlands, cutting between tribes and effectively creating rival centers of authority and patronage (between Kabul and British India).[10] Agreement by Russian and British administrators to preserve a buffer state of Afghanistan between their own territories was crucial to the state-building process undertaken from the 1880s by Emir Abdur Rahman.

British forces had actually intervened twice on the side of Afghanistan against Iran, in 1838 and 1856, to stop Persian forces taking the Afghan province of Herat. But for the development of Afghan nationalism, more than other factors, it was the series of foreign military invasions—the last of which took place in 1979—which paved the way for the development of nationalism.

ANGLO-AFGHAN WARS

Three Anglo-Afghan wars were crucial in the context of developing a sense of incipient nationalism, as well as serving indirectly to consolidate the Afghan state. As the Swiss ethnologist Pierre Centlivres explains, the wars produced a traumatic effect that can hardly be exaggerated:

For many people in Afghanistan, if there is an embryo of national feeling ("conscience"), it is rooted in history and in the heroic imagery of the struggle against the English in the nineteenth century. It is also the source of popular political thought.[11]

The first two wars took place during the period of British expansion of power in India (1838–42; 1878–80), when the Russian empire was also expanding into Central Asian borderlands. Because the Afghan wars entered into the national psychology, occupying a key place in oral history as well as the later state-conceived version of national history, the basic details are restated here.

The first Anglo-Afghan war was a misconceived attempt by the British to counter the exaggerated threat of Russian expansion. A British army was assembled in India in 1838 to advance into Afghanistan and to substitute for Dost Muhammad the British client or puppet ruler Shah Shujaʿ as emir of Afghanistan. Although regular British forces easily gained control of Afghan towns, establishing garrisons in Kabul and three other strategic places, the heavy financial costs of occupying Afghanistan, as well as the need to invade, were increasingly questioned by British officials.

With Shah Shujaʿ placed on the throne, his weakness as well as the vulnerability of the British army became very clear in the harsh winter of 1841, after its exposed cantonment outside Kabul began to be attacked. An order to retreat back to India on foot across passes already deep in snow in January 1842 resulted in catastrophe. Almost the entire force of 4,500 soldiers and some 12,000 camp followers were killed

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or taken prisoner. It was a military catastrophe that had serious repercussions in India. In autumn of 1842, fresh British forces advanced from India and retook Kabul, burning the bazaar in revenge for their defeat and rescuing British prisoners held in Bamiyan. But they then quit Afghanistan.[12]

A second Anglo-Afghan war began in 1878, again sparked by revived British fears of Russian plans to gain control of Afghanistan and from there to go on to attack India. Influential British military strategists subscribed to the "forward policy," which would have advanced the imperial defensive frontier north of the Hindu Kush mountain barrier, implying the absorption of Afghanistan into British India. The British made the presence of a Russian mission to Kabul the ground for sending in three armies.

Initial successes were followed by the massacre of the British mission in Kabul in September 1879. However, under General Roberts, British forces won many battles; Kabul was again occupied, along with the whole of southern Afghanistan; and the emir soon abdicated. Less than a year later, British forces were withdrawn and a treaty agreed to between the British and a strong claimant to the throne, Emir ʿAbd al-Rahman, who had spent a long time in exile in Russian Turkistan. He accepted British control of foreign relations in return for a large annual British subsidy and modern weapons.

The third Anglo-Afghan war was fought in the spring of 1919, after World War I, and lasted barely one month. The new Afghan ruler King Amanullah ordered Afghan forces to advance into British Indian territory in the Khyber Pass area while an abortive Afghan attempt was made to start an uprising in Peshawar city, capital of North-West Frontier province. Afghan attacks along the borders were quickly checked by British Indian troops, and a British air attack on Kabul damaged Afghan morale and helped convince Amanullah to request an armistice.

OPENING UP OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The peace treaty ended forty years of British control of Afghanistan's foreign relations. Until then, Afghanistan's rulers had been restricted just like Indian maharajas as far as this aspect of sovereignty was concerned. Thus, the brief 1919 war was regarded with reason by Afghan nationalists as a successful struggle for independence and, as such, began to be celebrated annually as a national day at the official level. From 1919, two themes that were vigorously pressed by the political elite were anti-colonialism and nation-building, with the basis for a modern national bureaucracy and state legal system laid by King Amanullah (1919–29).

Diplomatic relations with the outside world began from 1921, when Afghanistan became a member of the League of Nations and cordial relations began to be developed with some major European states. Afghanistan's ruler of the time, King Amanullah, was keenly aware of the sensitive geographic situation of this poor and undeveloped country lying on the borders of two powerful empires, Russia and British-ruled India. Naturally, Afghanistan's rulers were keen to lessen their dependence on British power and subsidies by diversifying their essentially client relationship with as many and, preferably, as distant states as possible.

Afghan governments deliberately favored a policy of reliance on countries that were not neighboring states—notably, Turkey along with Germany and France.[13] Turkey's

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role was not new, having been considerable in the military sphere in the Ottoman period but declined rapidly from the 1920s. Germany and France stood out as the European countries with which Afghanistan maintained the most important contacts from trade, aid, and broader cultural relations. The United States began to be aware at all of Afghanistan's existence only after World War II,[14] with the beginnings of the Cold War, while the Soviet Union maintained very limited contacts until the mid-1950s, after Daoud Khan became prime minister.

For up to half a century, then, Afghanistan maintained close links in cultural, educational, technical, and economic fields with key countries of Western Europe. This factor played an important part in other spheres of development in this land, which had never been colonized and whose society and economy remained highly traditional and undeveloped compared with its neighbors. This bilateral aid started to build up neglected areas such as all-weather roads, high schools that spread literacy beyond a tiny class, new health facilities, and help with new cultural initiatives.

Both Germany and France were key partners in development from the 1920s. Germany was an early donor of technical aid, and numerous German technicians, specialists, and some private entrepreneurs went to live and work in Afghanistan from this period—with the exception of the 1940s, when Germans were forced to leave by British–Russian pressure. France, for its part, also became a greatly valued provider of educational expertise and aid. Germany and France established and maintained large lycees, or high schools, in the Afghan capital. They helped provide education of a high standard for the children of elite families, with German and French teachers assigned to the respective German and French medium schools in Kabul (Amani Hochschule and Istiqlal Lycée, respectively).[15]

Together with other high schools founded by Britain and the United States, using English as the principal foreign language (and also later Russian–medium instruction in a polytechnic), this mix of languages lent an unusually cosmopolitan air to Afghanistan's educational system, in which, of course, the two national languages—Dari (Persian) and Pashto—also had their place.

After the foundation of Kabul University, these existing links were expanded. Some of the new departments of Kabul University were linked to prestigious European universities, as well as some in the United States. Thus, university teachers from France and West Germany came to Kabul, while programs of scholarships were inaugurated from the 1950s by other West European countries, and especially the United States. In the sensitive field of Islamic studies, links were developed with al-Azhar in Egypt and with other Muslim states.

Higher education assumed a highly international flavor. Besides the flourishing cultural and educational links with West Germany, France, the United States, and the USSR by the 1960s, Afghanistan had well-established contacts (often including scholarship programs) with Britain, Italy, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, India, and China.

By the 1960s, a considerable proportion of the academic staff at the University of Kabul had earned degrees at Western universities. A parallel institution, Kabul Polytechnic, was founded with Soviet funding and exclusive Soviet backing. The significance for nationalism and national politics of the rapid expansion of higher education was that a large, volatile constituency of young men and women, often eager for

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political and social change, was created in the capital. It was from Kabul University and Polytechnic's staff and student cadres that most of the future leaders and activists of the country's opposition circles and parties were recruited. They included new pro-leftist parties, notably the Khalq and Parcham factions of the People's Democratic Party (PDPA), Islamist and Afghan nationalist groups. Because these circles tended to be concentrated in the capital, where the government and power was, their periodic demonstrations could not easily be ignored.

The USSR itself had rapidly established dominance from 1955 as the main provider of foreign aid, including in the vital sphere of military training. It was specifically from the army and air force that many of the PDPA cadres were formed. Units of the armed forces were to carry out the military coup in April 1978 and enable the small, divided party to hold on to power in a difficult, hostile environment.

Even before the end of the 1950s, the USSR was allowed to take a tacit monopoly in development of Afghanistan's rich natural gas and other forms of mineral resources throughout that half of the country lying north of the Hindu Kush, adjacent to the three Soviet Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.[16] Indeed, the virtual sphere of influence gained by the USSR over northern Afghanistan took on aspects of a clearly neo-colonial relationship, expressed later in the PDPA official formula for the USSR as the "Great Northern Neighbor."

GROWTH IN STATE POWER

Afghan nationalism developed in tandem with state power and state control over peoples living in the kingdom. Under Emir ʿAbd al-Rahman in the 1880s, state power grew by a form of internal colonialism, with military pressure and coercion used against unruly, often independent Pashtun tribes and against non-Pashtun minority peoples gradually brought under firmer control by the center. Before 1880, Afghanistan was only nominally a monarchy—as understood in Europe, at least. In reality, Afghanistan's system of government was more one of military aristocracy, the ruler being in theory established for life. In practice, as the Afghan historian Hasan Kakar has observed, there was inherent instability with no guaranteed political succession, and the death of each ruler was regularly followed by civil wars between rival claimants to power.[17] Indeed, few Afghan rulers have died natural deaths.

ʿAbd al-Rahman Khan, the "Iron Emir" (1880–1901), was the first ruler to attempt seriously to break the power of the tribes, many of them Pashtun. Rebellions were constant, and an element of political irredentism was present from the beginning of his reign. He failed, though, to extend central authority over the eastern Pashtun tribes in the key frontier region known as "Yaghistan" ("land of rebels," implying rebellion against their legitimate rulers), lying between Afghanistan and British India, in eastern areas either side of the Durand Line. For Afghan rulers, all these eastern Pashtuns essentially belonged to Afghanistan, for these peoples were claimed to be "of my nationality and my religion," in the significant phrase attributed to Emir ʿAbd al-Rahman.

The campaigns to impose central rule and authority over formerly autonomous areas of Afghanistan varied in intensity and ferocity. In the southeast, in the region later known as Nuristan ("land of light"—i.e., Islam), where the indigenous tribes of "Kaf-

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irs" were forcibly converted to Islam, the campaigns were relatively mild. But in the large mountainous central region of Hazarajat, where tribes of Hazaras were despised as Shiʿi Muslim heretics by the Sunni Pashtuns, the defeated inhabitants were cruelly dispossessed of their lands and often enslaved; and in the north the Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Persian-speaking Tajiks were brutally brought under control, with rich lands taken by Pashtun settlers.[18]

These determined efforts to extend control over far-flung regions took place in the context of steady Russian and British advances, respectively, in the Pamir region and Chitral. Any theory of the Afghan state—more of a mini-empire in the sense of Iran or Ethiopia (Abyssinia), all multi-national states—did not actually require fixed territorial borders reaching to the limits of ethnic settlement of Pashtuns and other peoples spread across state borders. Yet it did have to face up to Iran's historical claims to Herat and the western borderlands as belonging to "Khurasan-i buzorg" (greater Khurasan), and the British (after 1947 Pakistan's) possession of Pashtun-settled lands claimed as belonging rightfully to Afghanistan. Other potential disputed territories were there to the north of the Hindu Kush which had been earlier linked to the Emirate of Bukhara as a kind of satrapy.[19]

HISTORY AND NATIONALISM

Neither ancient nor medieval history has become well integrated into the emerging nationalist presentation of Afghanistan's history. The image of the colossal Buddhist statues at Bamiyan did appear on national postage stamps, but it was never adopted methodically as the symbol for the nation's past glories—like, for example, the pyramids in Egypt or the Arch of Ctesiphon or the Hanging Gardens of Babylon in Baʿthist Iraq.[20] The most plausible reason for this is the marked Afghan bias toward Islam: Buddhist and Zoroastrian rulers and archaeological monuments from the pre-Islamic Gandhara era are popularly held to be alien and almost irrelevant as the works of mere "kafirs."

This attitude is in striking contrast to other regional states such as Iran and India. Ancient history counts for much more in Iran, where the Achaemenid and Sassanid empires, along with Zoroastrianism and other pre-Islamic elements of Persian history have been integrated and duly celebrated as part of the national heritage. The contrast is just as sharp in India, where the Kushan dynasty's Kanishka of the 2nd century is officially celebrated as one of India's great rulers along with Asoka, Akbar, and other historical rulers.[21]

IRREDENTIST NATIONAL GOAL

Successive regimes in Kabul never developed a coherent national ideology. Official nationalism espoused the cause of "freeing" the Pashtun tribes of Pakistan (North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan), with the goal of forming a Pashtun (or Pathan) state to be called Pukhtunistan (also Pashtunistan) and eventually uniting them with Afghanistan. Aside from territorial gains, this would have ended Afghanistan's landlocked status by giving it access to the Arabian Sea and also have further in-

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creased the weight of the Pashtun element in an enlarged Afghanistan, inevitably at the expense of the country's non-Pashtun groups.

Kabul's "Pukhtunistan" policy was based upon a long-standing irredentist grievance, but in its operation it was essentially opportunist and reactive to political events across the contested Durand Line border with Pakistan. Becoming the main plank of Afghanistan's official nationalist policy, Prince Daoud's pro-Pukhtunistan initiatives took the form of annual days, officially organized demonstrations, symbolic postage stamps, and many tracts and other publications intended to further the cause.

Although Afghanistan can in some respects be correctly described as a Pashtun state, as the historian Alastair Lamb cogently writes:

> There are a number of absurdities and contradictions in the Afghan case for Pakhtunistan, and it is clear that many of the arguments which the Afghans raised in this connection were intended for internal rather than external consumption.[22]

The results of Daoud's pro-Pukhtunistan policy were wholly negative. It had caused by 1963 a damaging series of confrontations with Pakistan, a key neighbor, which led to periodic closure of the Torkham border and transit trade, inflicting serious economic damage on Afghanistan. The government's pursuit of the irredentist chimera of achieving Pukhtunistan, though admittedly popular with many Pashtuns, sharply divided the population, with members of the non-Pashtun minorities deeply alienated by the policy.

There was valuable Soviet diplomatic backing for Afghanistan on this issue against Pakistan, not only the enemy of the USSR's regional ally India but a member of the CENTO alliance at the time. Significantly, in Soviet-published works of this period it was taken as a matter of course that all Pashto-speakers were "Afghans," rather than accepting the fact that they were divided between two states.[23]

However, the Afghan adherents of the Pukhtunistan cause were not all pro-Soviet; nor were they inclined to communism or left-wing politics. A virulent form of Pashtun nationalism developed with "Afghan Millat," the name of a political party and newspaper published from 1966, essentially an ultra-nationalist, racist Pashtun grouping founded by Ghulam Muhammad Farhad. Its goals included widest use of the Pashto language, elimination of all "imperialist" and foreign influences, and achieving "Greater Afghanistan," an irredentist vision based on the extensive empire conquered by Ahmad Shah Durrani.

REWRITING OF HISTORY

In Afghanistan, as elsewhere, the writing and rewriting of history has been intimately linked to currents and fashions in national politics. Yet modern Afghanistan historiography is thin on the ground, with regrettably little original research done. State-promoted historical writing for journals or special publications tended slavishly to follow official policy. As Nazif Shahrani justly complains, "The invisibility of non-Pushtun groups (even the larger Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluch and Nuristani) was particularly evident in official histories taught in the school systems."[24]

However, there have been valuable reassessments of early modern history by Professor Hasan Kakar (former head of the history faculty of Kabul University) and by

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the late Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghobar, a prominent member of Kabul's historical society in the 1940s who became well known for his critical analyses of Afghanistan's history. Ghobar's most famous book, *Afghanistan in the Course of History*, written in Persian, was banned by an intolerant government.

Historical writing unfortunately became polarized along narrow sectarian lines, with Pashtun nationalist writers often in vehement opposition to non-Pashtun and notably Shiʿi Muslim historians. Afghan historians have tended to become strident apologists for their respective communities. An example of this regrettable tendency are recent polemics mounted against the Shiʿi historian Sayyid Qasim Rishtiya.[25]

The shaping of Afghan national consciousness had a strong input from the state, though certainly its impact was less marked than in neighboring countries with more developed bureaucracies, greater technical capabilities, and a wider spread of literacy. A national museum was finally created in Kabul out of archaeological finds, and the country was mapped, both enterprises achieved essentially through foreign technical aid.

An index of Afghanistan's underdevelopment can be seen in the fact that, unlike other states of the modern world, no national census has been made (it was under way in 1978 but abandoned in the civil war). This omission makes the very size of the total population uncertain, and rough guesses or informed estimates have encouraged partisans of the country's ethnic and sectarian minorities to fantasize about the numbers of their respective communities, and their corresponding claims to a share of power.

RADIO AND THE NATIONAL IDEA

Radio broadcasting has been of great importance in spreading the national idea, as in many Middle Eastern countries. It is worth considering in detail. As technology improved and prices came down, the medium of radio was bound to be more significant than printable materials, because literacy rates were so low in Afghanistan (usually estimated at under 10 percent even as late as 1970). The government's wider aims were clear long before that stage had been reached. Radio Kabul, when it officially opened in 1940, included among its stated goals: to reflect the national spirit, to perpetuate the treasures of Afghan folklore, and to contribute to public education.[26]

On the larger cultural plane, after it developed over the next decades radio had an undeniable impact on the nation-building venture pursued from Kabul. Its broadcasts of radio music were assessed by the American musicologist Mark Slobin as being "one of the few manifestations of an emerging pattern of national values and expression that may eventually comprise a pan-ethnic, distinctively Afghan society."[27] (This prediction came up against the rise to power of the fundamentalists—not only represented by the Taliban. All musical life in Afghanistan was proscribed in areas under the rigid Puritanism of the Taliban, along with TV, cinema, and other works of the devil.)

The significance of Radio Afghanistan's musical programs was that it was created and disseminated what the English musicologist John Baily calls a new kind of Afghan urban popular music: "Pashtun culture provided the basic musical style, Tajik culture the poetry and the most common melodic mode."[28] However, it seems that the

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role of music in expressing and helping create an Afghan national identity was not so much planned as an unforeseen indirect result of broadcasting policy.[29]

Kabul Radio's brief experiment in the early 1970s in promoting other newly designated "national" languages—notably, Uzbek—was a popular move among the minorities. Hitherto completely marginalized in public life and education, the Uzbek community gained a new sense of ethnic pride from radio broadcasts in the Uzbek language. Ephemeral though these initiatives were, there can be little doubt that they had a significant impact, as seen also, for example, in the case of the Pashai language.

These initiatives were abandoned, though, for political reasons by Prince Daoud after he seized power in a coup in 1973, declaring himself president. However, when his regime was replaced in turn by another coup in 1978, the new left-wing regime of Nur Muhammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin embarked on a reinvigorated policy of promoting Uzbek, Baluch, and other languages of Afghanistan's minorities by radio and new publications. This was certainly molded on Soviet nationalities policy, and broadcasts were mixed with propaganda on behalf of the new regime.

TRANSNATIONAL IDEOLOGIES

Transnational ideologies influencing Afghan nationalism are basically twofold: communism (mainly Soviet-backed but also of the Chinese "Maoist" variety) and Islamism ("militant Islam" or "fundamentalism"). Liberal-democratic ideas had a certain following among the educated elite but have been cruelly squeezed since 1978, surviving mainly in exile among Afghan communities in diaspora.

Communism as such was never the declared policy of Afghan governments, except during a brief, muddled period from April 1978, immediately after the "Saur Revolution." Yet Marxist–Leninist ideas were certainly current in PDPA activist circles. Influence of the Tudeh Party of Iran on the fledgling Afghan left-wing scene was marked from the 1950s, together with the growth of a so-called Maoist movement popular in non-Pashtun educated circles. That said, the spread of Marxist ideology as such remained very superficial, represented essentially by populist rhetoric of the PDPA governments.

Afghan nationalist themes of defense of the homeland against foreign aggression were extolled by both the Khalq and the Parcham factions of the PDPA from 1978—notably, against the two neighbors Pakistan and Iran but also against Britain and the United States. This trend continued under the regimes of Babrak Karmal and Dr. Najibullah. But there was a fundamental ambiguity in PDPA attempts to utilize nationalism and anti-foreign sentiments, because many Afghans considered the successive PDPA governments as alien and hated puppet regimes imposed by the USSR.

Hardly surprisingly, it was the Afghan opposition to the PDPA that far more successfully exploited nationalist sympathies. Babrak Karmal, backed by Soviet power after the military invasion at the end of 1979, was frequently identified by their propagandists with the hated 19th-century Afghan ruler Shah Shujaʿ, whom the British had tried to place and keep on the throne.

Since the 1978 revolution, and especially during the war of resistance to a PDPA regime imposed by Soviet power, national identity as Afghans and as citizens of

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Afghanistan developed considerably. The experience of exile in particular helped forge this among at least 5 million Afghan refugees—about one-third of the total population—a sense of belonging to one country.

In addition, there has been the profound social impact of the long destructive war after the 1978 Saur Revolution. The traditional hierarchical class system, along with the significance of tribe and *qawm*, has been altered and modified by the rise of new political parties and local guerrilla fronts, frequently led by men from socially insignificant or inferior families instead of the old elites.[30] Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and other non-Pashtun groups that lacked political clout organized themselves along ethnic lines during the struggle and effectively challenged Pashtun dominance.

Some special features of Islam in Afghanistan have had a marked impact on nationalism. As contrasted with India and other Muslim lands that were colonized, Afghanistan had maintained "the unapologetic interpretation of jihad well into the twentieth century."[31] With the Islamists' struggle first against secular Afghan rulers in the 1960s, then against Soviet-backed regimes, the concept of jihad was fully reinstated in its traditional militant form and given a prominent place in the Islamist parties' respective political strategy.

In any review of nationalism in Afghanistan, the role of Islam in Afghan society as legitimizer of authority—and at times rebellion, too—under successive rulers has to be examined. From outside, Afghanistan may appear a remarkably homogeneous society, with more than 97 percent of its population declaring themselves Muslims, and only tiny non-Muslim communities (Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews). However, this conceals a basic divide between the Sunni Muslim majority following the Hanafi rite and substantial Shiʿi Muslim minorities—mainly imami Shiʿis (Twelvers), but also Ismailis. The Sufi *tariqa*s and their *pir*s (hereditary saints) have and retain today a wide following, and tribal custom is more important in many spheres of life than shariʿa law.

Under Emir ʿAbd al-Rahman in the 1880s, the mullahs (or Muslim clergy) never formed one homogeneous group, even if they did form a distinct social group separate from the rest of society. At this time, the Afghan "state" was still very undeveloped, basically a tribal confederacy with the ruler's legitimacy sanctioned by the ulama. It moved slowly and in varying degrees away from this traditional model, as the rulers' power grew along with the state's resources and coercive power.

Islam has served at times as a unifying force against foreign, non-Muslim invaders, but it has never been enough in itself to unite all Pashtuns and other ethnie of Afghanistan. In the past, Pan-Islamism has been an attractive ideology, stronger at times of anti-colonialist fervor (explaining Emir Habibullah's hardly deserved reputation among Muslims in India as "King of Islam," along with that of his reforming successor Amanullah in the 1920s and 1930s).

The contemporary phenomenon of "political Islam" in Afghanistan arguably has a basis in the traditional role of Sufism and influence in society of the most prominent *pir*s ("saints"), together with the constant allure for Afghans of the concepts of jihad and martyrdom. Afghanistan's contemporary Islamic movement has cohered around a new Islamic paradigm focusing on the concept of the state and legitimacy of power.[32]

Here the impact of foreign ideology, organization, and funding is quite clear. The main source of funding for the contemporary Afghan Islamist tendency has been Saudi Arabia, mediated through Pakistan. As to its ideology, this is inspired from the

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Ikhwan al-Muslimin of Egypt and Maulana Abu'l-Aʿla Maududi's followers in Pakistan. However, the failure of the Saudi Arabian government to formulate any coherent policy on Afghanistan makes it actually quite unrealistic to attribute all "Islamist" activities helped by Gulf Arab funding to deliberate policies set in Riyadh. The Arab component in the Afghan struggle was mainly through financial contributions from Saudi Arabia and Qatar toward paying for weapons and sustaining the guerrilla resistance to the USSR from 1984.

Inside Afghanistan, the so-called Wahhabi emirate in Kuna province was established, albeit briefly, in 1989, and funded directly by the Saudis. However, the growth of Wahhabi ideas and influence through Afghan converts was treated with dismay and some disgust by the great majority of the Afghan population, who saw it as another aspect of foreign meddling, and the emirate soon collapsed from internal tensions.

The trans-national aspect of Pan-Islamism has been seen in the phenomenon of Arab mujaheddin fighting inside Afghanistan from the mid-1980s, stirring international interest and alarm.[33] Whether these Arab volunteers for the Afghan jihad played a significant role in the military struggle is very debatable, although the political impact of Arab volunteers who returned secretly to their homelands, especially in Egypt and the Maghrib states, is undeniable.

THE TALIBAN FACTOR

The Taliban movement, which began in 1994 among Pashtuns of Kandahar based in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, captured Kabul in September 1996. If the material godfathers of the Taliban were Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and the army, along with Saudi Arabia, its spiritual godfathers are the Jamiʿat-i Ulama-i Islam (JUI) of Pakistan, which organized the madrasas (or colleges) and orphanages that many of the Taliban fighters attended.[34]

The Taliban's charismatic leader, Mulla Omar, has declared that the movement is engaged on a mission to create a pure Islamic state in Afghanistan. Afghan nationalism as such is not an important element in the Taliban worldview. Yet the backing for the Taliban remains overwhelmingly Pashtun, and one valid explanation of how the movement gained such rapid appeal in Kandahar and other Pashtun heartlands is that it thrived on a Pashtun backlash, a keen resentment against the eclipse of Pashtun power, in the form of the rise of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras in the Afghan struggle from 1992. The Tajik forces of Ahmed Shah Massoud backed the Rabbani government and controlled much of the capital, together with mainly Uzbek forces of General Dostum and Hazaras of various factions. Jointly, these non-Pashtun groups dominated northern and central Afghanistan as well as the capital.

Pakistan, even more than Iran, has seen volatile shifts in its relations. Before the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996, the sacking of two successive Pakistani embassy buildings in Kabul by mobs in actions deliberately encouraged or licensed by the Rabbani–Massoud regime was attributed to popular fury among Kabulis at Pakistani interference and covert support for the Taliban, allegedly Pakistan's creature and (for some) its "Frankenstein's monster."

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In spite of this vital backing from Pakistan, and all its internal problems, the Taliban regime showed signs of incipient Afghan irredentist nationalism vis-à-vis Pakistan. A territorial claim to a Pashtun area south of the Durand Line in tribal areas inside Pakistan was made in June 1998, reportedly with an illegal occupation made by the Taliban.

Equally disturbing is another recent development. The xenophobic isolationist streak of Afghan nationalism has been pandered to blatantly by the Taliban authorities, which have also chosen to exploit popular Afghan suspicions of Western–Christian plots and interference. Taliban representatives made shrill accusations of Western humanitarian aid agencies being spies (at the time of virtually expelling them from Kabul in July 1998) and no less grotesquely branding the sparky European Union Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs Emma Bonino as being engaged in, of all things, Christian proselytism among Afghans.

The Taliban had as a basic goal to reunite the entire territory of Afghanistan. The de facto federal structure (i.e., with virtual autonomy achieved for local communities after the collapse of central state power), along with the fragile balance of power between rival ethnic groups, are both threatened by outright military victories by the Taliban. The very unity of Afghanistan as a multi-ethnic state could become an indirect victim.

Even Pakistan, a much stronger state, with its large Pathan (Pashtun) minority, will certainly not be immune to heavy pressures and strains in the event of a division or partial disintegration of Afghanistan. In spite of Pakistan's massive backing for the Taliban since 1994, the latter have demonstrated many times that they were anything but Pakistani puppets and that, moreover, they mean precisely what they say when asserting what they call "Islamic" values and moral standards.[35]

Given the acute tensions and rivalries present between the parties in this civil war, it is not surprising that many analysts have raised the prospect that Afghanistan actually might disintegrate under the pressures into its constituent ethnic components or raised the scenario of new mini-states emerging out of the wreck of Afghanistan. According to the anthropologist Bernt Glatzer, for all the real dangers posed at this crisis in Afghanistan's history, none of the ethnic groups is united as an organized political entity capable of following a strategy of separation. Moreover, there are countervailing factors at work: two decades of war may have destroyed the country, but at the same time has produced an

> [a]wareness of national unity [which] has increased considerably . . . even the Hazara, who at present show the highest degree of internal political integration, feel strongly that they are Afghan nationals.[36]

NOTES

[1]See further Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos, "Nation and Nationalism in Contemporary Europe: A Theoretical Perspective," in *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos (London, 1996); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J., 1993).

[2]See Frederik Barth, *Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance in Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, ed. Frederik Barth (Boston, 1969).

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[3]Quoted in Jadwiga Pstrusinska, "Afghanistan 1989," in *Sociolinguistic Perspecive, Central Asian Survey* (London, 1990).

[4]Richard Tapper, "Introduction," in *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, ed. Richard Tapper (London, 1983); Christine Noelle, *State and Tribe in Nineteenth Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan (1826–1863)* (Richmond, U.K., 1997).

[5]Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton, N.J., 1980); and see Jan-Heeren Grevemeyer, *Afghanistan. Sozialer Wandel und Staat in 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1987).

[6]H. W. Bellew, *Afghanistan: The Country and People* (Lahore, 1978), 46.

[7]S. A. Mousavi, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study* (Richmond, U.K., 1998).

[8]Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 120–21.

[9]Quoted in R. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh, 1964), 158.

[10]Alastair Lamb, *Asian Frontiers: Studies in a Continuing Problem* (London, 1968); C. Collin Davies, *The Problem of the North-West Frontier, 1890–1908* (London, 1932).

[11]Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont, *Et si on parlait de l'Afghanistan?* (Neuchatel, Switzerland, 1988), 286.

[12]One concise, objective study of these wars is by T. A. Heathcote, *The Afghan Wars 1839–1919* (London, 1980).

[13]See Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan, 1880–1946* (Stanford, Calif., 1969).

[14]Leon B. Poullada and Leila D. J. Poullada, *The Kingdom of Afghanistan and the United States 1828–1973* (Omaha, Neb., 1995).

[15]Henry Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviety Union* (Durham, N.C., 1985); Pierre Metge, *L'URRS en Afghanistan 1947–84* (Paris, 1984).

[16]See further Hasan Kakar, *Afghanistan: A Study of Internal Political Developments, 1880–1896* (Kabul, 1971).

[17]See further Jonathan L. Lee, *The Ancient Supremacy: Bukhara, Afghanistan and the Battle for Balkh, 1731–1901* (Leiden, 1996); and Nancy Tapper, "Abd al-Rahman's North West Frontier: The Pashtun Colonization of Afghan Turkistan," in *Conflict of Tribe and State*.

[18]Lee, *The Ancient Supremacy*, chaps. 3 and 4.

[19]About the Iraqi dictatorship's harnessing of history, a shrewd analyst writes: "The Ba'th today exude an air of timeless inevitability, a sense of connectedness with the past so profound that its terminus in their rule seems almost logical": see Sami al-Khalil, *The Monument: Art, Vulgarity and Responsibility in Iraq* (London, 1991), 131.

[20]See Romilla Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice* (New Delhi, 1975).

[21]Rishtia was the author of a number of history monographs, such as *Afghanistan dar Qarni-i-Nuzdahum* (Kabul, 1336/1957).

[22]Lamb, *Asian Frontiers*, 92.

[23]Mahnaz Ispahani, *Roads and Rivals: The Politics of Access in the Borderlands of Asia* (London, 1989), chap. 3.

[24]M. Nazif Shahrani, "The Future of the State and the Structure of Community Governance," in *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, ed. William Maley (London, 1998), 229, n. 30.

[25]Propaganda for the Pakhtunistan idea to Pashtuns living under Pakistani rule was always a primary purpose of Kabul Radio broadcasts: see J. C. Victor, *La Cite des Murmures: L'Enjeu Afghan* (Paris, 1983), 58.

[26]See Davies, *North-West Frontier.*

[27]Quoted in Mark Slobin, "Music in Contemporary Afghanistan," in *Afghanistan in the 1970s*, ed. L. Dupree and L. Albert (New York, 1974), 248.

[28]A detailed exposition focusing on Herati music can be found in John Baily, *Music of Afghanistan: Professional Musicians in the City of Heart* (Cambridge, 1999), 82.

[29]John Baily, "The Role of Music in the Creation of an Afghan National Identity, 1923–73," in *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Martin Stokes (Oxford, 1994).

[30]Olivier Roy, "The New Political Elite of Afghanistan," in *The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan*, ed. M. Weiner and A. Banuazizi (Syracuse, N.Y., 1994).

[31]See Asta Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan* (Richmond, U.K., 1995), chap. 8.

[32]Ibid., 245–46; see also Oliver Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge, 1986).

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[33]See Anthony Davis, "How the Taliban Became a Military Force," in *Fundamentalism Reborn?*

[34]Anthony Hyman, "The Arabs in the Afghan War," *Beirut Review* (1994).

[35]See Ahmed Rashid, "Pakistan and the Taliban," and Davis, "How the Taliban Became a Military Force," in *Fundamentalism Reborn?*

[36]See Bernt Glazer, "Is Afghanistan on the Brink of Ethnic and Tribal Disintegration?" in *Fundamentalism Reborn?*

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