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AFGHANISTAN: TRANSITION WITHOUT END

AN ANALYTICAL NARRATIVE ON STATE-MAKING

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Afghanistan: transition without end

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‘But even in the most civilised countries examples are not wanting to show that they had at the commencement of their history to fight against their own people, who did not at first understand the conditions of civilisation’.

Life of Abdur Rahman, Amir of Afghanistan, Vol. 1, p. 219

Introduction: Afghanistan’s social structures in the context of state- building and state crisis

Despite many ups and downs, the region today known as Afghanistan has by no means been a stateless territory throughout most of its known history. Ruling elites were repeatedly able to establish sets of social relations with both social groups and local elites, and these relationships have enabled them to exercise control and influence over people, territories and resources, as well as to obtain recognition from neighbouring states. These activities fit pretty well with the definition of a state. In very simple terms, Afghanistan’s social structure in the late-nineteenth century could be described as a mix of:

- a few cities and small towns;
- tribal societies (mainly in the east and south-east);
- proto-feudal landlords;
- semi-autonomous farming communities;
- dependent farmers.

During the twentieth century, cities expanded and dependent farming became more common through the spread of indebtedness, while farm labour became relatively common (Anderson 1978). Tribal structures correspondingly started to weaken, and an intelligentsia started forming. However, on the whole the picture did not change drastically; in fact the heterogeneity increased. This heterogeneity was reflected in the existence of multiple legal systems, conflicting cultural and political values and multiple languages (see Table 1), all of which had important repercussions on the process of state-building. It is worth noting that all these different types of rural society were very able to mobilise locally for collective action, either because they could be mobilised from above (in the case of patronage based communities (Rubin 1995:44; Barry 2001: 102-3) and proto-feudal environments (Barry 2001: 114-15; Reisner 1929; Katkov 1989; Davydov 1976) or because they had community institutions to facilitate collective action, such as tribal leaders and local elders, tribal militias (*arbakai*), or community and tribal assemblies (*shura* and *jirga*). The fact that Afghans largely live in settlements and farmers as a rule do not live in isolated farms further contributed to the ease of mobilisation. The absence or weakness of centralised law enforcement until the end of the nineteenth century resulted in communities maintaining their autonomous military capabilities for confrontation with neighbouring communities. Moreover, the Afghan state often relied on the mobilisation of militias to form large armies, further strengthening the military dimension of local societies. The main limitation of these

communities, as far as their military capabilities were concerned, was the lack of sustainability of their mobilisation away from the home territory for long periods of time, unless some external support was provided in the form of supplies and cash, or looting was possible. Another limitation was that because Afghan society was and is strongly segmented, mobilisation for collective action mainly happened at the local level, for example at the level of a cluster of villages, a valley or an oasis. The development of roads from the 1950s onwards changed the picture only in part, not least because of the limited development of the road network (Gentelle 1980: 286).¹ By the 1970s the disintegration of tribal relations following the development of class relations was still at an early stage even in the most developed parts of the countryside (Anderson 1978; Tapper 1983). The urban-rural split further contributed to the fragmentation of the country.

The two main types of networks that allowed for collective action beyond a small cluster of villages were tribal and religious ones. The former were generally stable and evolved slowly; their largest expressions were the Durrani and Ghilzai confederacies, but even these very rarely operated as unified entities, particularly after the eighteenth century (Yusufzai 1997). Religious networks could often be wider and more importantly were capable of adapting more quickly to changing circumstances. Moreover, they were better suited to bringing together communities that might otherwise have been divided by long-standing rivalries, because they escaped segmentation to a large extent. Coalition-building, therefore, mostly took place through religious networks (Canfield 1973, 1984; Ahmed 1987). The best known of these networks were Sufi ones, but in reality all *ulema* were organised by means of some form of network. Starting from the First Anglo-Afghan war the *ulema* became increasingly politicised; this process continued throughout the twentieth century, accelerating in the 1980s under the influence of the newly radicalised Deobandi school in Pakistan (Dorrnsoro 2000; Roy 2002).

Table 1: the segmentation of Afghan society in 1979

Urban	15.4%	
Rural	84.6%	
	First language	All spoken languages
Pashto	48%	55%
Dari	40%	65%
Uzbek	8%	8%
Turkmen	2%	2%
Others	2%	2%
Tribal Pashtun	15%	
Semi-detribalised Pashtun	26%	
Detribalised Pashtuns	5%	
Urbanised Pashtun	5%	
Urbanised Tajiks	3.5%	
Tajik Rural communities	16%	
Shia Tajiks and Qizilbash	0.5%	
Uzbeks	9%	
Turkmen	2%	

¹In the early 1960s, wheat prices had a variation range of 150% in towns, reflecting economic fragmentation, but this had fallen to 30% by 1966 (Fry 1974: 58-9).

Ismaili (Pamiri and Tajiks)	1%	
Shiite Hazaras	13%	
Sunni Hazaras	2%	
Nuristani	0.5%	
Others	1.5%	
	100%	

Source: author's own estimate based on the literature.

The process of state formation up to 1943

The origins of the Afghan state are those of an imperial polity; that is a patrimonial state based primarily on coercion and conquest. A definition of the Afghan state in terms of its revenue-raising system is difficult because it incorporated a variety of different practices, but the dominant system before the beginning of the reforms relied on tribal and community elders to raise tax for (substantial) profit. In a sense it was a form of 'tax farming' (Kakar 1979: 73-5).

The empire was the creation of Ahmad Shah Durrani in 1747 and despite several phases of decline and recovery it remained valid until the Second Anglo-Afghan War. However, the First-Anglo-Afghan war marked a turning point in that it witnessed the emergence of 'popular participation' in warfare, while at the same time witnessing the decline of the old mode of 'aristocratic' warfare. Some scholars believe this to be the starting point of the process that led to the establishment of the first elements of a 'modern' or 'bureaucratic' state in Afghanistan. The aristocracy, scared by the emergence of popular mobilisation under the clergy, became ready to support a modernisation of the 'imperial state' (Barfield 2004). It is nonetheless important for our purposes to lay out certain aspects of the functioning and structure of the imperial state under the aristocracy, as these aspects continued to play an important role long after modernisation efforts were launched. The main hypothesis of this work is that the crisis of the Afghan state in the late-twentieth century originated from the difficulties implicit in the transition from an imperial, patrimonial polity based on arbitrary power to a more institutionalised, bureaucratized and inclusive polity.² The most salient characteristic of the imperial state was a complex web of alliances with local communities and segments of the population, which enforced territorial control on behalf of the imperial centre. Often the 'victims' of imperial expansion would themselves be recruited as subordinate partners of the centre, making further expansion possible. In this sense we might speak of 'subaltern coalition-building', whereby groups external to the ruling elite try to form alliances with them under threat of retaliation, and of 'coalition-building from the top'. Thus, yesterday's enemy was turned into tomorrow's ally. My hypothesis is that in order to function, the system required:

- 1) room for expansion;
- 2) charismatic leadership;
- 3) effective and highly skilled political leadership;
- 4) an 'extra' advantage to set off the process in the first place; that is, something giving a particular tribe and its leader an edge over their rivals.

² By institutionalisation (institution-building) in this paper I simply refer to the process of embedding values and norms in state organisations in order to reduce uncertainty and increasingly shape expectations. By bureaucratisation I refer here to the process of making state institutions responsible not to an individual (the ruler), but to impersonally applied rules, and to the process of staffing them with salaried professionals who do not own the institutions themselves.

Ahmad Shah Durrani provided that extra advantage because of being a warlord ‘orphan’ of the Persian empire. He inherited a chunk of the Persian army, including some of the artillery, which gave him an edge over rival tribes. His profile and power then acted as catalysts, first to win him first the support of his own tribe and then to attract other tribes and clans. Ahmad Shah was certainly a charismatic leader and was able to exercise skilled leadership. However, it should already be obvious that conditions 1, 2 and 3 were rarely met by subsequent political leaders, hence the chronic instability of the Afghan state. As the nineteenth century wore on, Afghanistan became completely surrounded by Empires (Russian and British) which its tribal levies could not hope to defeat; at least certainly not when away from their mountains. Hence the ‘room for expansion’ was no longer there, further complicating the task of the rulers. This led to rulers trying to increase the strength of the central state in order to stabilise the empire, but with little success due to the resistance of the aristocracy and the tribes. In this sense the First Anglo-Afghan war (1839-42) represented a turning point, as mentioned earlier.

Modernising efforts can already be discerned during the reign of Sher Ali Khan (1863-1879), even if he was badly constrained by ongoing rivalries within the royal family. Not only had he tried to increase the professionalism of the army, but he had also tried to enhance the inclusiveness of government through the creation of a Council of Elders, which included groups traditionally hostile to the Durrani monarchy, such as several Ghilzai and some non-Pashtuns (Saikal 2004). He established a military school which was ethnically mixed, opening the military career to non-Pashtuns, created the first Afghan postal service (limited to the Kabul-Peshawar route) and the first press publication. However, his efforts were clearly insufficient, as Afghanistan broke apart again during the Second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-80). The new army collapsed and different segments of the population mobilised; however, as this mobilisation occurred in the absence of strong political leadership (Sher Ali was sick at that time), it came at the expense of the central government as well as of the British.

A change in the international environment, however, came to offer some respite to the Afghan state. As the Russians and to an even greater extent the British started seeing Afghanistan as a useful buffer state between their two empires, the rulers of Afghanistan became able to play them off against each other and extract resources from both sides (although initially from the British). The effects of this were visible by the time of the reign of Abdur Rahman (1880-1901), when the attempt to build a bureaucratic, centralised state started (Kakar 1979, 2006; Tarzi 2003). The focus of his efforts was the army, in which he invested large amounts of resources and the subsidies provided by the British. Other aspects of the ‘modernisation’ of the state under Abdur Rahman included the establishment of ‘identifiable government administration and legal systems’, the creation of unified (nationwide) rules and regulations and the establishment of a powerful intelligence network inside the country (Saikal 2004: 36-7). He recounted how before he started his reforms the Mustafi (a sort of prime minister) could just count on a small staff of 10 clerks, and carried out the administration of the whole kingdom from his bedroom (Khan 1900: 2, 50). He reformed the fiscal system, eliminating ‘tax farming’ (Kakar 1979). Abdur Rahman was also the first Afghan ruler to claim a divine right to rule,³ and to invest much energy in trying to turn the clergy into state functionaries. He was also the first to turn the tribal Grand Councils into a state-sponsored institution; under him the Grand Council was no longer a genuine tribal gathering, but a meeting of tribal representatives appointed from the top. Both in religious and tribal terms, Abdur Rahman was clearly engaged in an attempt to establish a form of political legitimacy more durable and

³ Another classic tool of state-making alongside patrimonialism, institutionalisation and bureaucratisation.

dependable than the charismatic patrimonialism that had characterised the most successful of his predecessors.

At the same time, however, and largely because of the lack of an external space to conquer, Abdur Rahman indulged more than any other ruler before him in the manipulation of local conflicts and in the mobilisation of certain sections of the population against others (Rubin 1995: 50-1). He furthermore introduced a new dimension to the practice of tribal/community manipulation. He invested considerable energy in splitting local polities into smaller units and trying to link them directly to the state; this was a clear break from the previous model, in which local, tribal and feudal rulers/leaders, controlling the territory of an oasis or a valley, would recognise the authority of the imperial state without this manipulation (Rubin 1995: 25). Abdur Rahman's attitude was reflected in the formation of smaller provinces out of the large ones which were in existence. By appointing his own trusted representatives in the place of local rulers, he laid the basis of what would become Afghanistan's subnational administration. The mix of patrimonialism and institutionalisation is particularly evident here. Abdur Rahman was also the first ruler to start the policy of deporting whole communities to far-off regions. In particular, he targeted rebellious Pashtun tribes and transferred them to northern Afghanistan, based on the assumption that once surrounded by hostile Uzbek and Tajik communities they would turn into loyal supporters of the central government. This practice was continued by his successors and was not terminated until 1959. As shown in Map 2, the reign of Abdur Rahman was exceptionally turbulent and violent, but he managed to steer through it all and died of natural death in 1901. Moreover, he eliminated the endemic banditry affecting the country by ordering that:

‘if a traveller is killed, or his property is stolen in the vicinity of a town or a village, the people of that town or village are either to find the wrongdoer or answer for the injury themselves.’ (Khan 1900: 2, 69)

The reign of his son and successor Habibullah is mainly of interest in our context because of his relatively greater friendliness towards the intelligentsia.⁴ Abdur Rahman was totally disinclined to listen to anybody's advice, while Habibullah authorised some of the few Afghan intellectual figures to return to Afghanistan and play a role, however modest, in government. He was influenced to some extent by nationalist and reformist ideas, but it is important to point out that the relationship between the monarchy and the intelligentsia was nevertheless uneasy from the very beginning. Far from becoming the darling of the intellectuals, Habibullah came under strong criticism for his refusal to align Afghanistan with the Central Powers during the First World War and to exploit the conflict to reclaim the territories that his father had ‘temporarily’ ceded to British India (Marwat 1997; Korgun 1983). Eventually he would be assassinated in a plot that was probably organised by the nationalist-reformists in 1919, following his crackdown on them.

The reign of Habibullah's successor, Amanullah Khan, is particularly interesting from our perspective because of how hard he tried to accelerate the transition from an arbitrarily ruled imperial state to a bureaucratised and institutionalised system (Poullada 1973; Nawid 1999; Gregorian 1969; Guha 1967). Keenly aware of how Afghanistan was lagging back compared to other countries in the region, Amanullah thought that the state needed to be strengthened and society made more dynamic. Although his ascent to the throne owed little to institutional rules and was not much short of a coup with the support of the limited circles of nationalists

⁴ Defined here as all those who deal with the production and distribution of ideas and culture, typically teachers, journalists and intellectuals.

and reformists (he was not the first in the line of succession) – and despite the fact that he may have been involved in the assassination of his father – Amanullah gained legitimacy by declaring *jihad* on the British Empire and invading British India. The aim was to rid the monarchy of British control over its foreign policy and to regain control over the territories beyond the Durand line, lost at the end of the Second Anglo-Afghan war. Although the military campaign quickly faltered, not least because of the deployment of the RAF, his gamble paid off. A tired Britain acceded to his request of reclaiming full control over foreign policy. The territories remained in British hands, but his gains were sufficient to make his position unassailable by rivals within the royal family, at least in the short term. This episode confirms the importance of external conflicts in consolidating political rule, if the ruler in question is able to exercise a clear leadership role in the conflict.

Amanullah had been a member of the nationalist and reformist circles before 1919 and soon embarked on an ambitious reform program with nationalist tinges: having lost the British subsidies, he did not try to replace them with subsidies from other countries. Inevitably, this meant that he had to increase taxes and reduce expenditure. Neither initiative was particularly popular. The fact that at the same time he decided to launch his ambitious reforms meant that military expenditures, previously by far the largest item of expenditure for the government, declined sharply during his reign. His reforms of the system of government included the following: the introduction of secular legal codes (based on the Turkish model) and of a corresponding judicial system, the prohibition of blood money, the abolition of subsidies and privileges for tribal chiefs and the royal family, the establishment of a well structured cabinet, the establishment of a national budget as opposed to the personal treasury of the ruler, the creation of a cadastre, the rationalisation of land taxes, the introduction of secular curricula in the state schools, and the institutionalisation of the private property of land. His social reforms included female emancipation, the abolition of slavery and a sort of land reform consisting of the sale of state land at low prices to allow poor peasants to buy it. His abandonment of religiously-inspired rhetoric at a time when he was greatly weakening the clergy by trying to exclude them from the judiciary – at the same time as antagonising the tribal elites – clearly shows that his political management skills did not match his ambitions. His naivety is perhaps best illustrated by his handling of the army: he drastically reduced salaries in order to push the old officers to quit and then be able to replace them, succeeding in this task if not in re-creating a new army from scratch. However, although Kemal Ataturk himself is reported to have advised Amanullah not to proceed with radical reforms before having created a strong army (Zikria and Missan 2002), Amanullah persistently underinvested in the army and particularly in its human resources. His judicial reforms, on the other hand, eloquently illustrate the overambitious aspects of his program: the school of law he created in the 1920s following the decision to establish a judiciary independent of the mullahs could not function because no professors qualified for the job could be found (Fouchet 1971).

Amanullah seems to have believed that in gaining nationalist credentials through the 1919 war he would be fully legitimised as a political leader and therefore did not need to pay due respect to the country's elites. The autocratic character of his rule increased after 1925, as his relationship with sectors of the reform-minded nationalist intelligentsia deteriorated. Despite having established the first real cabinet (on paper), Amanullah continued to take care of the smallest details of the administration, dedicating a day per week to a different ministry (Fouchet 1931). Autocracy unsupported by military strength led to his overthrow in 1929 (see Crises 1928-9), after which the reform movement in Afghanistan suffered a major backlash. Freedom of opinion and discussion virtually disappeared, while the leading reformists were forced into exile, including King Amanullah himself. After a 9-month interlude under

Habibullah II, another member of the royal family (Nadir Khan) captured the capital in 1929 with the support of the tribes, and was recognised as king by the clergy and the tribal aristocracy, starting a new dynasty as Nadir Shah. Having earned glory as a general in the 1919 war and enjoying tribal support, Nadir was well positioned to emerge as a strong ruler. He abolished the most controversial of Amanullah's reforms, such as girls' education, but maintained the structural, legal and administrative ones. He shifted the focus of government expenditure back towards the army, which needed to be completely rebuilt. After initially receiving British aid to re-establish the army, his budgets were entirely reliant on internal resources, with the effect that little was left for social expenditure or even infrastructural development (Saikal 2004: 101-2). In 1931 Nadir issued his constitution, a perfect example post-Amanullah reformism in Afghanistan. Although in theory it looked well advanced, with provisions for the separation of powers and the appropriate checks, balances and guarantees of personal freedom, in practice the absence of genuine representation ensured that the constitution would never be effectively implemented. It should be seen more as an exercise in window dressing for the benefit of the international community than a genuine reformist/modernist effort. The most dramatic demonstration that the Constitution was only meant for external purposes is the fact that not even the ministers knew its content; the existing copies of the constitution were not accessible to anyone (Ghobar 1967).

There is some debate among scholars about whether Nadir's rule was on course to have a stabilising effect on Afghanistan, but in any case he was assassinated in 1933 by a follower of Amanullah seeking personal revenge for the execution of relatives. Possibly because the aristocracy and the royal family were still shocked by the events of 1929, the next succession was smooth: Zahir Shah became king, but due to his young age his uncle Hashim Khan effectively became the real ruler despite officially being just the prime minister. During his eleven years in power, Hashim Khan ruled as a complete autocrat, treating his own ministers as 'nothing more than heads of office'. He would take all the decisions and even imprisoned one of his ministers over a disagreement (Farhang 1988). Typically, he was only forced to resign in 1943 when the rest of the royal family united against him because of a food crisis and because they felt a facelift was needed in order for Afghanistan to be respectable enough to be included in the forthcoming United Nations (Farhang 1988).

Crises 1839-1929

During the 1839-42 war, British intervention initially did not arouse strong feelings among the population. In a region dominated by warrior aristocracies, rulers viewed conquest as the business of displacing rival elites. The inhabitants were viewed as passive, only concerned with supporting and protecting their families. However, the exceptions were the tribes up the mountains, who were normally left alone. Until the nineteenth century, Afghanistan was conquered many times and in each case it had not proven particularly difficult to control the population. So when the British initially occupied Afghanistan in 1839, they met little resistance. The elites of the Durrani and Ghilzai confederacies as well as the clergy, all of whom they subsidised, were easily convinced to accept Britain's favoured candidate for the throne, Shah Shuja. What caused the start of the war was the attempt of the British to change the status quo once Shah Shuja turned out to be an inept ruler. They moved to take control of government themselves in order to make administrative reforms designed to increase state power. Hence they launched a plan to modernise the army, which implied reducing the power of the Durrani feudal notables. In order to balance the budget, they set out to reduce the subsidies paid to Durrani and Ghilzai chiefs and the clergy and to improve tax collection in the villages. They also intervened in the provinces to improve local 'governance', to the

disgruntlement of the local tribes. The result of this upsetting of the whole balance of the system was the revolt of the Durrani aristocracy and their clients in Kabul against army reform, the revolt on the part of several tribes in the south, south-east and east against interference in local affairs, and a further revolt of the Tajik communities of Kohistan against higher taxes (see Map 1). Some authors see the introduction of cheap muskets and rifles, which were affordable to many 'commoners', as a key factor in making the revolt possible and ultimately successful. Indeed the British were not defeated in an open battle, but through guerrilla warfare (Barfield 2004; Yapp 1962, 1963, 1964).

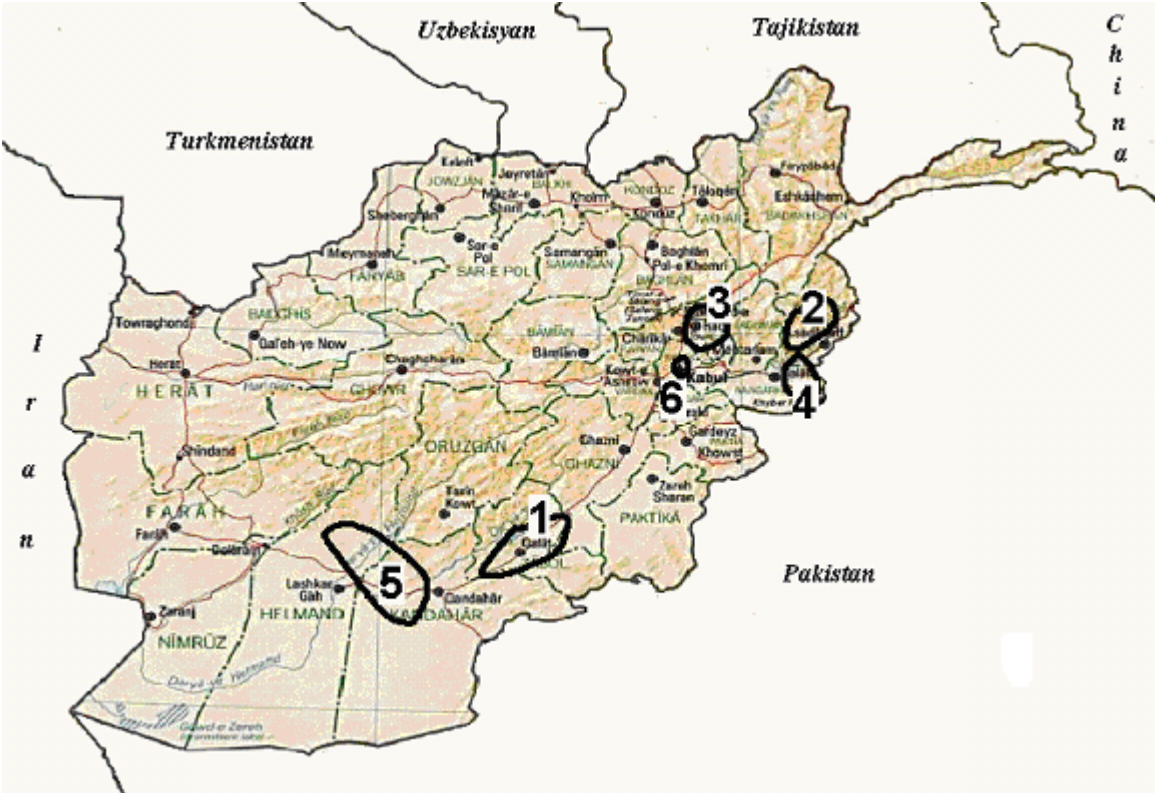
During the reign of Abdur Rahman (1881-96), about 40 revolts and civil wars were recorded. Maps 1 and 2 show how compared to 1841-2 the areas affected were much wider. However, the revolts also occurred over a much longer time span and more importantly were not connected to each other. There was no general revolt against Abdur Rahman, but a succession of localised insurgencies and wars. Abdur Rahman emerged from this comparison with the crises of 1841-2 as a skilled if ruthless political leader, very successful in keeping his enemies divided and in claiming the political 'centre ground'. While he was being paid a substantial amount of his budget by the British and had accepted the sacrifice of more than half of the Pashtun heartland as well as of Afghanistan's foreign policy, he was still able to pretend to be a bulwark against foreign aggression. Moreover, while he was bringing the clergy under his control, he could claim to be the true defender of Islam. By organising *jihads* against groups of the population such as the Kafirs of future Nuristan and the Shias of Hazarajat, he effectively prevented the clergy from unifying and mobilising sectors of the population against him on a national scale. As mentioned in the introduction, the role of clerical networks has always been key to large scale revolts in Afghanistan. Abdur Rahman neutralised them by seizing the ideological initiative (Barfield 2004; Kakar 1979, 2006).

As a result of Amanullah's neglect after 1919, the central army was reduced to almost nothing by 1928 and proved unable to offer serious resistance. In 1924 the army was already having difficulties repressing a tribal revolt in Paktia among the Mangals. For all of his reformism, Amanullah still proved ready to mobilise tribal rivals in order to repress the Mangal tribe, repeating the now well established pattern of tribal manipulation (Rubin 1995: 56). By 1928-9 Amanullah in his political naivety had carelessly alienated both the tribal leaderships and the clergy. It did not take long, therefore, before religious leaders found common cause with tribal leaders. Map 3, when compared to Maps 1 and 2, shows how the geographical spread of the revolt against him was quite limited in comparison to the revolts against Abdur Rahman, but these revolts occurred in synchronicity and were unified by their religious sponsorship. The case of his immediate successor, Tajik Habibullah Kalakani (Habibullah II), is enlightening. As it appeared that the army was not able to control tribal turmoil in the south, Habibullah succeeded in gathering a few thousands Kohistani Tajiks and descended on Kabul, beating the Pashtun tribes to the capital. Despite being a non-Pashtun of humble social background, it is striking that the clergy agreed to support him. His counter-reforms included the abolition of Amanullah's reforms and of compulsory military service, the cancellation of taxes imposed by Amanullah and the closure of secular schools. Habibullah II does not seem to have faced much trouble in imposing his authority in the cities. In the rural areas, several eastern and south-eastern tribes even provided militias for him, while the Ghilzai confederation sat on the fence for several months. Habibullah's real trouble started when, faced with a bid for power organised by Nadir Khan and with a decline in economic activity because of the war, he had to break his promise not to raise taxes. Moreover, because he did not have much control over the state apparatus, he was actually unable to raise funds in sufficient measure to pay a large army. As he was forced to stop paying subsidies to the

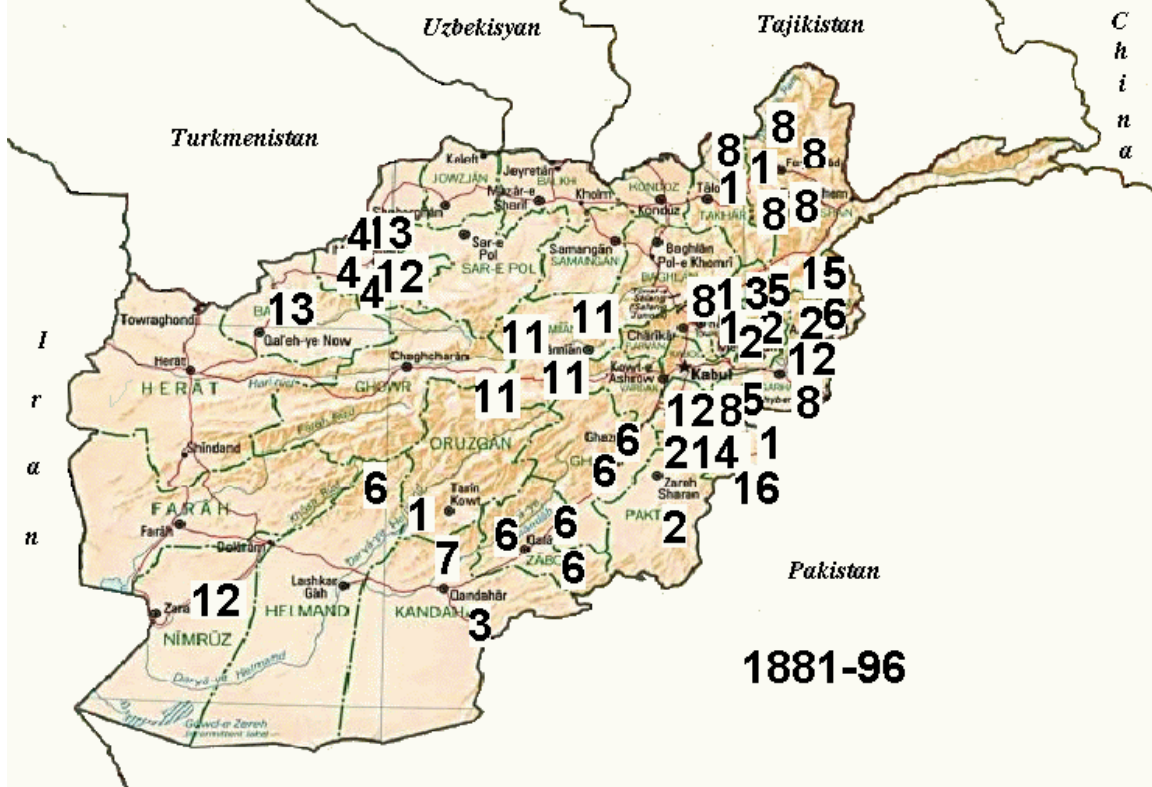
tribes, they not only had no reason to support him anymore but became aware of his growing weakness. Sensing that the tide started turning against him, more tribal leaders joined Nadir Khan's campaign and Habibullah was soon overwhelmed (Saikal 2004; Habibullah 1990; Sokolov-Strakhov 1931; Jaekel 1977; Korgun 1983, Boyko 2000; Khalili 1980).

This analysis of the crises of 1839-1929 illustrates the extent to which strong political leadership is necessary to successfully manage systems as non- or weakly institutionalised as Afghanistan's; it also shows how a strong and effective military force is needed whenever an attempt to change the status quo is undertaken.

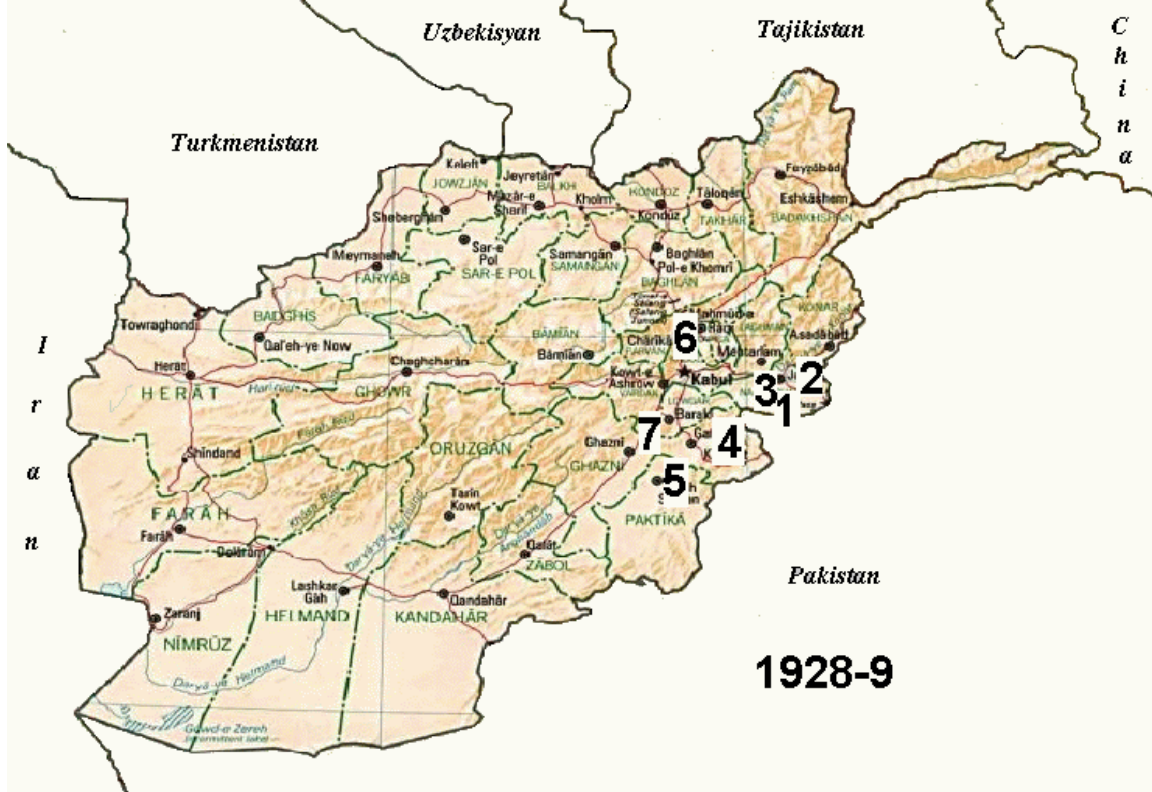
Map 1: Geographical spread of the revolt against Shah Shuja and the British, 1839-42.
Note: the provincial division shown on maps 1-3 dates to the 1970s.



Map 2: Geographical spread of the revolt against Abdur Rahman Khan, 1881-96..



Map 3: Geographical spread of the revolt against Amanullah, 1928-29..



Changes in military organisation 1842-1933

As mentioned already, one of the driving factors of modernisation in Afghanistan was the need to create a more effective army. The introduction of artillery in an Afghan army had already taken place with Ahmad Shah in 1747, but it is worth noting that specialist units like the artillery remained the preserve of non-Afghan sections of the population; more precisely Persian troops, which had followed Ahmad Shah to Kandahar and settled in Afghanistan afterwards. Therefore for some time there was no need to create structures in Afghan society to allow for the development of the skills required to maintain 'scientific' branches of the armed forces: until Abdur Rahman all the equipment and supplies of the artillery units were bought from abroad. By the 1840s, however, the situation had changed and even the feudal cavalry that had represented the bulk of previous Afghan armies appeared outclassed. Dost Mohammad, the king left in control after the British withdrawal in 1842, mustered an army estimated at 30,000 men composed of Pashtun cavalry and infantry as well as Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek contingents; but by the end of his reign the army also included the first few regiments trained 'European-style' (Gregorian 1969: 76-7, 84-5; Azimi 1998; Noelle 1997; Gankovski 1985). His successor Sher Ali further expanded the army to over 50,000 men, mostly regular forces, but his army failed miserably against the British in the second Anglo-Afghan war. Most authors attribute the failure to Sher Ali's poor health and the consequent lack of leadership (Azimi 1998,; Ghobar 1967; Gankovski 1985), which in itself highlights the fact that the army remained largely patrimonial in character and dependent on the leadership skills of a single man. Moreover, the army remained weak on administration, logistics, discipline and quality of weaponry.

Under Abdur Rahman the army reached its peak of 82,000 men, all regular troops, to which 6,400 Royal Guards should also be added. Abdur Rahman considered the creation and maintenance of a strong army one of his top priorities and personally dedicated a day of every week to this task. He received a lot of financial and material help from the British, and on top of this managed to obtain more from Germany and France. However, he fiercely opposed the involvement of foreign officers in the training of his forces, fearing that this would lead to a loss of loyalty in its ranks. As a result, the only help came from a few Indian Muslims who themselves had only limited knowledge. As a result, the quality of the officers' corps left much to be desired (Azimi 1998; Gregorian 1969: 140-1; Gankovski 1985). Nonetheless the army proved apt at dealing with internal disturbances very effectively, even if Abdur Rahman still reverted to the old practice of mobilising local communities for waging internal wars.

An army of that size was a major burden for Afghanistan. Once the political situation inside the country had been stabilised by the end of the nineteenth century, it came to be seen as redundant, particularly given the absence of immediate external threats. Under Habibullah I, the stress was on improving the quality of the officer corps and a military academy was opened in 1904, although the cadets were still largely drawn from the aristocracy. The size of the army was greatly reduced to 24,000 trained men (Azimi 1998; Gregorian 1969: 184; Gankovski 1985). Under Amanullah the army experienced a further decline, even if its personnel charts were still close to those of Habibullah's time at 23,000. Opinions about its actual strength vary, but in reality it does not seem to have reached even 10,000. The new guns and twelve planes purchased abroad would therefore prove to be of little use when the time of confrontation came. Not only had Amanullah reduced expenditure on the army, but much of what was spent on it went towards expensive technologies like planes, which in the end proved too sophisticated and maintenance-heavy to be actually used. The army was thoroughly demoralised by the late 1920s. Moreover the officer corps was divided to the extent that they became paralyzed between the supporters of the Turkish model and more

moderate elements, led by Minister of Defence Nadir Khan. The latter, a member of a rival clan of the royal family, is accused by some scholars of having actively sabotaged Amanullah's reforms with an eye to undermining his power (Saikal 2004: 78, 85; Sokolov-Strakhov 1931 : 27-8; Azimi 1998; Gankovski 1985).

The army of Habibullah II inevitably had peculiar characteristics; it included the remainder of Amanullah's regular army, which by that time amounted to very little indeed, but was mostly formed out of insurgent armies from Kohdaman and Kohistan as well as tribal militias from the south-east and east. Its strength has been estimated at 20,000 men at its peak (Azimi 1998: 17). With the exception of some remnants of Amanullah's army, it was largely untrained and proved unable to handle the tribal levies of Nadir Khan south of Kabul.

Table 2: Strength of Afghanistan's armies and incidence of regular forces in their composition

	Total	Regular/trained
Dost Mohammad 1857	25,000	7,400
Sher Ali	54,900	
Abdur Rahman	88,400	88,400
Habibullah I	24,000	24,000
Amanullah	10,000	10,000
Habibullah II	20,000	4,000
Nadir Shah	72,000	70,000
Hashim Khan	82-92,000	80-90,000
Zahir Shah	82,000	80,000
HDK (1988)	160,000	101,500
Rabbani (1995)	70,000	-
Taliban	100,000	-
Karzai (2003)	49,000	4,000

Sources: Azimi; Giustozzi 2000, 2007e; Kakar 1979; Gankovsky; author's own estimates.

Between autocracy and liberalism 1943-1973

Table 3: Tribal and ethnic composition of elite

	Mohammadzai	Other Durrani	Other Pashtuns	Tajiks	Others
Up to 1978 all	24.6%	5.8%	24.5%	29.2%	15.9%
Up to 1978 core	44.7%	0	28.9%	15.8%	10.6%
Parcham	0	20.8%	37.5%	33.3%	8.4%
Parcham core	0	50.0%	0	25.0%	25.0%

Source: Rubin 1995.

The demise of Hashim Khan in 1943 seemed initially to usher Afghanistan into a new era of liberalism. This is largely seen by scholars as the result of indecision within the country's elite with regard to how to face the rising internal contradictions of the system. The decline in

external trade due to the Second World War combined with three years of drought (1943-5) to squeeze Afghanistan's economy. Some scholars allege that the tribal revolts of 1944-5 among the Zadran, Mangal and Safi, while still led by the Khans, were motivated by the worsening conditions of the farmers (Davydov 1967: 159-60). Whatever the actual situation inside the country, the new Prime Minister Shah Mahmud did not imitate the autocratic style of his predecessor and allowed more debate in the country. The process culminated in the 1949 parliamentary elections, seen by some as the freest ever held in Afghanistan. Certainly, the establishment was taken aback by the large number of reformist and progressive MPs elected (around 40-50 out of 149), several of whom belonged to more or less radical groups. Although the government still managed to gain a majority in parliament, the implicit potential of a future challenge to the elite ensured that the parliament would not be renewed (Saikal 2004; Reardon 1969).

Shah Mahmud's relative liberalism started being perceived as weakness within the ranks of the aristocracy, strengthening the position of the Defence Minister, Mohammad Daoud, a cousin of the King who cultivated an image of himself as a strongman and reformer. When in 1950 a coup attempt failed, rumours circulated insistently that Daoud might have been behind it (Akram 2001). During the same year, Daoud made another bid to demonstrate who held the real power within the cabinet when – without Shah Mahmud's authorisation – he ordered the armed forces to shut down the border with Pakistan and sent units of the army into Pakistani territory to support tribal unrest against Islamabad. Although Pakistan had all the winning cards in this game and successfully retaliated with an economic blockade of landlocked Afghanistan, Daoud was still able to cast himself as the defender of the cause of Pashtunistan and as the defender of the rights of his Pashtun brethren across the border. Shah Mahmud tried to shore up his position using populist tactics, trying to unload the responsibility for the ongoing economic crisis on the country's main private conglomerate, the Bank-i Milli group, and issuing an anti-speculation law that threatened punishment against anybody who stocked agricultural products. This ill advised law is seen by some as one of the main causes of the 1952 famine, as it discouraged the accumulation of reserves of wheat by farmers (Farhang 1988). Moreover, rising urbanisation combined with the famine to push prices sharply upwards. As the state coffers were emptying and accusations of corruption started flourishing among the people (Ghobar 1967), the progressive opposition became more vocal. In 1953 the climax culminated in street protests that were violently repressed by the police. Shah Mahmud's credentials were by now completely worn out, and he resigned.

The accession to power of Shah Mahmud in 1943 represented the beginning of a new phase in the history of the monarchy, marking a break with the previous phase of fluctuation between reform and reaction; from 1943 onwards, the fluctuation was between different views about which reforms should be implemented and how. Shah Mahmud's successor Mohammad Daoud incarnated the opposite view to that held by his predecessor: what Afghanistan and the establishment needed was not liberal reforms, but the strengthening of central government and the identification of new sources of legitimisation. As had already been demonstrated in 1950, Daoud did not refrain from taking big gambles in his determination to make Pashtunistan the defining issue on which to base his government's legitimacy. Already as defence minister he had started surrounding himself with a network of Pashtun nationalists, often characterised by racist tendencies (Saikal 2004), although as PM he took care to co-opt a substantial number of Tajiks into the government. It has been argued that Daoud, like the rest of the royal clan, used international aid resources mainly to benefit Pashtuns, presumably in order to consolidate Pashtun nationalism as the base of the monarchy (Rubin 1995: 66). Compared to his predecessors (both kings and Prime Ministers), with the

partial exception of Amanullah, Daoud displayed a greater readiness to interact, use and manipulate the political organisations of the intelligentsia. Some sources even claim that he controlled the leading reformist organisation (Korgun 1983). However, it is exemplary of his opportunistic attitude that he carefully avoided incorporating the intellectuals into his government, opting instead to surround himself with cronies and sycophants. Consequently the skills of his cabinet left much to be desired, even by Afghanistan's standards (Zikria and Missen 2002). His brinkmanship with regard to Pakistan was matched by his ruthless manipulation of external powers to fund his projects and to earn political support. As PM his major innovation was to introduce a new policy of cooperation with the Soviet Union, which rapidly became the almost exclusive supplier of military equipment to Afghanistan. The relative sophistication of the equipment, which included tanks and – for the first time in Afghanistan – jet planes, led to a large-scale training program for Afghan officers and specialists within the USSR.⁵

Daoud's international brinkmanship was far from being without failings, however. By the early 1960s his pro-Pashtunism had landed him in serious trouble. When the Pakistani government in 1961 decided to call his bluff and to carry out a raid deep into Afghanistan's Kunar province with some tribal support, it appeared clear that Afghanistan was no match for Pakistan on the battlefield (Farhang 1988). In 1963 the heavy economic and political cost to Afghanistan of the ongoing confrontation with Pakistan, which had repeatedly led to border closures and economic blockades, forced Daoud to reach a compromise with King Zahir and resign from the position of PM. However, his resignation was accompanied by an understanding that he would be reappointed relatively soon, once the tension with Pakistan had calmed down. Despite the fact that thanks to international aid Daoud was able to launch a massive program of infrastructural development during his premiership, his attitude to modernisation was at best ambiguous. Some observers maintain that to him nationalisation and planning were just tools for fighting his war against the perceived threat of potential competitors emerging from outside the ranks of the aristocracy. In particular he saw Zabuli, the owner of the Bank-i Milli Group and patron of several progressive and leftist groups, as harbouring political ambitions. After having initially cooperated with him during the phase of his ascent to power, he turned against Zabuli once appointed as PM, shaping the economic policies of the government against Bank-i Milli and targeting his companies for nationalisation (Balland 1973; Haider and Nicolas 2006: 95; Franck 1956). By the 1970s two-thirds of industries were under the control of the state, which ran them ineffectively; despite the inability to satisfy demand in any sector, most industries were largely under-utilised (Gentelle 1980 : 288).

1963 marked the appearance of King Zahir on the political scene. Far from being ready to become a ceremonial figure as Daoud had proposed before resigning (Saikal 2004: 141-4,) he was now willing to exercise his power directly. The royal family had always been divided into different factions, which in the 1950s and early 1960s pitted Daoud and his brother Naim against the king's uncle Shah Wali Khan and Daoud's own uncle Shah Mahmoud, who both opposed the pro-Soviet turn (Reardon 1969: 164). Zahir appointed a non-Mohammadzai as PM for the first time – Dr. Mohammad Yusuf, inaugurating what would become known as the 'New Democracy' period. A non-member of the royal clan was also appointed for the first time as Minister of Defence, the second most important cabinet position at that time. The King then moved to exclude Daoud from active politics at the top of the state: the new constitution approved in 1964 banned members of the royal family from serving in prominent

⁵ An account of Daoud's diplomacy by a former Afghan diplomat is provided by Ghaus.

positions, while at the same time preserving the supreme authority of the King. The constitution was mainly noted because of its introduction of a parliamentary system with democratic guarantees and the establishment of the judiciary as a separate branch of the state, under the supervision of a Supreme Court, whose members were appointed by the King.

Hailed as the start of Afghanistan's golden period, the democratic reforms of Zahir Shah are today recognised as suffering from multiple flaws. The first one was the refusal to promulgate a law on political parties, which ended up incapacitating the parliament whilst also failing to prevent social and political unrest from growing. The second flaw was the lack of popular support for the reforms and of any effort to mobilise it, beyond a politicised middle class which would soon start opposing the King from the left because he did not dare to go far enough (Saikal 2004). The third flaw was a consequence of the first: the incapacitated parliament failed to produce the legislation needed to fulfil the constitution and to make the machinery of government work in a new, more accountable way. The fourth flaw was that fact that Zahir Shah's commitment to democratic government was still ambiguous: not only did he prove unable to provide an overarching ideology within which to frame the reform process, but he emptied the reforms of their stated meaning by appointing as successive Prime Ministers his own confidants, as opposed to skilled and charismatic political leaders capable of mobilising sections of the parliament behind them. Furthermore, he would not leave any PM in charge for more than 2-3 years; as soon as they seemed to be gaining some popularity, he would replace them. The worst case in this respect was that of Maiwandwal, who was quite successful in gathering moderate leftists and progressive elements around himself and set out to create a social-democrat type party. Not only did he lose the premiership, but the King orchestrated a negative press campaign against him and banned him from running for a parliamentary seat in the 1969 elections (Saikal 2004).

The theory that Zahir's reforms were mainly motivated by internal rivalries within the royal family seems therefore to be quite appropriate (Saikal 2004: 150-1). He invested his energy in creating his own patronage network to rival Daoud's, particularly in the army, in which any appointments over the rank of captain he kept as his own exclusive domain. He was essentially ruling through trusted family members and loyal functionaries, who were able to disregard even the decisions of the cabinet of ministers. While the democratic reforms stimulated the political appetite of the middle classes, they did not go far enough to save him from the challenge within the royal clan. Despite his marginalisation, Daoud managed to maintain a network and to even expand it within parliament and the new political parties that were being established despite the lack of a law authorising their formation (Saikal 2004: 154). In the elections of 1969, the intervention of the Ministry of Interior was much heavier than in 1965 and resulted in a parliament dominated by conservative elements: landlords, tribal leaders and mullahs (Tapper 1983).⁶ Together with a decline in foreign aid (see Table 6), which was in part a result of the inability of the government to utilise it effectively and prepare projects (Fry 1974: 159), this caused a paralysis of the government due to the refusal of the conservative majority to authorise higher taxation. Creating new jobs for the now rapidly expanding intelligentsia was already becoming a problem by the early 1970s, a fact that gave rise to frustration in its ranks and soon began to radicalise it (Sawitzki 1972: 110-1). While the protesters of the 1960s were still radical democrats who wanted a more inclusive and transparent government, by the early 1970s the political scene was shifting towards the 'extremes' and in particular the Maoist left (Korgun 1983).

⁶ In 1962, 93% of the educated class was employed by the state (Reardon 1969: 171).

As the 'democratic' government was becoming increasingly discredited in the early 1970s due to the incompetence and corruption (Fry 1974: 168) of the government in dealing with famine in the countryside, the King appeared more inclined to allow his latest (and last) Prime Minister, Musa Shafiq, greater freedom in advancing some key reforms. It was, however, too late. In 1973, possibly because he was worried by Musa Shafiq's progress or because he saw an opportunity in the government's state of disrepute, Daoud staged a successful coup in alliance with nationalist and leftist elements within the armed forces. It is particularly remarkable that the king had not been able to maintain an army loyal to himself despite having appointed every single one of its medium and high ranking officers.

Daoud, having abolished the monarchy and proclaimed himself President, immediately returned to his old policy of confrontation with Pakistan, presumably hoping to legitimise his rule through a popular cause. At the same time he announced a large program of modernisation, featuring greater centralisation, state regulation of the economy, a range of social and welfare reforms, the expansion of education opportunities and of course an anti-corruption campaign. He certainly succeeded in conveying an image of himself as dynamic leader. Moreover, many of his reforms were judged *ex-post* to be sound. Having broken with the royal family, he tried to expand his support base by incorporating more Ghilzais into government (Saikal 2004: 177). Nevertheless, however dynamic he might have been, his autocratic tendencies (he personally selected each one of the top state functionaries) (Victor 1983: 56, 68), his tendency to surround himself with corrupt sycophants (Ghaus 1988: 191) and his impulsive style, as well as his continuing distaste for the intelligentsia, eventually combined to land him in a situation that was almost impossible to manage. After obtaining massive amounts of Soviet help to launch his reform and modernisation program, he proceeded to reject Soviet support in 1975-78 when he turned first to Iran and then to Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The damage done by his habit of surrounding himself with incompetent cronies is evident in these choices and the way he handled Soviet complaints about his attitude (Saikal 2004: 184-6).

From the mid-1970s the Soviet Union started actively considering the option of supporting a coup against him and probably endorsed recruitment in the armed forces by pro-Soviet groups within Afghanistan. Although in the end the April 1978 coup happened without prior Soviet knowledge (Saikal 2004: 183), Daoud's foreign policy was compromising one of the fundamental conditions of survival of the Afghan state; that is the interest of neighbours in maintaining and protecting it as a buffer. The move away from Soviet support was in part motivated by Daoud's increasingly tense relationship with the leftist elements which had brought him to power. After unwittingly opening the door of national politics to the intelligentsia, he tried and failed to force it out again (Rubin 1995: 74). The Parchamis were almost completely purged of the government in 1975,⁷ and after that Daoud's pressure on them and other leftist groups kept increasing. However, in part because of his exaggerated trust in his own judgement, Daoud – like Zahir Shah before him – failed to check the rising influence of opposition groups within the armed forces. By the mid 1970s not only were the two main groups of the pro-Soviet left recruiting successfully, but other leftist (including Maoist), nationalist and Islamist groups were all recruiting too (Azimi 1998: 98).

An examination of the 1933-73 period leads to a more focused hypothesis about the crisis of the Afghan state: the aristocratic elite leading the process of modernisation was only partially committed to it. The creation of a modern bureaucratic state necessitated the formation of an

⁷ The Parcham wing of the Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq (People's Democratic Party) had been the closest leftist group to Daoud.

intelligentsia, which would inevitably at some point stake a claim to a share of power. The aristocracy, ridden by family rivalries, was at least united on denying access to power to the intelligentsia, which in turn became increasingly radicalised.

The political economy of Afghanistan 1933-1978

As is the case with most states during formative periods in their history, in Afghanistan throughout the period explored in this paper defence from neighbouring states and from internal challenges were much more predominant concerns than capital accumulation. Only once the existence of the state came to be guaranteed by the 'international community' did accumulation start emerging as a new priority. It is easily understandable that as long as a war was going on, the primary concern of the participants was to play a key role in the establishment of the future political order. One question to be answered in this regard relates to why the ruling elite did not develop an appetite for capital accumulation during the relatively long period of peace of from 1930-1978.

While there is no question that after the First Anglo-Afghan War efforts to modernise the army were intended seriously, the real aim of economic reforms from 1933 onwards is still a matter of discussion. Undoubtedly, the focus of the modernisation effort was on infrastructural development as opposed to the expansion of productive activities, whether agricultural or industrial (see Table 5). Two writers have commented that modernisation seemed to be targeted at the needs of the aristocracy: a new airport; a theatre, the abolition of the veil, the establishment of more capable communication and transport infrastructure and so on (Haider and Nicolas 2006). Majid Zabuli, in a series of articles published in the Afghan press in 1970, expressed a similar opinion: 'our greater mistake...has been to borrow from the foreigners more and more without carrying out administrative reforms, without training technicians and specialists, without mobilising our internal resources...'.⁸ By 1969 there were already 2,200 foreign experts in Afghanistan (Etienne 1972: 230). There is strong evidence that as early as the 1930s development strategies were meant more as window dressing than as serious efforts to change the structural basis of the country's economy, as has also been argued for the 1931 constitution (see *The process of state formation to 1943*). By 1950, despite having developed a 40,000 strong bureaucracy, the Afghan state still had no real budgeting system, nor a fiscal system, nor for that matter a statistical service (Gentelle 1980: 282; Schiro 1971).⁹ In this context, there was no way that Daoud's decreeing the passage to a planned economy could be more than a mere gesture (Haider and Nicolas 2006: 81; Farhang 1988; Etienne 1972: 228-9). The bureaucracy would later expand and reached 100,000 by the 1970s (Grevemeyer 1990: 227), but even if a statistical office did exist by then, it numbered just 250 staff; clearly too few to produce anything resembling reliable statistical data. Thus, behind the modern/bureaucratic façade, the state continued to be run very much in the same old way. In this sense the Afghan case seems to fit the non-developmental (functionalist) states theory better than any other. 'Minimal resources' were a key constraining factor, although in this case one cannot speak of the impact of colonialism nor of the consequent 'need to construct political alliances at short notice' (Lockwood 2005: 70).

⁸ Abdul Majid Zabuli, in Caravan, Kabul, 24 June, 1, 8, 9 and 11 July 1970 (cited in Etienne 1972).

⁹ In 1932 estimates of the population varied between 6-15 million. (Fry 1974: 13).

Table 4: Domestic revenue and government expenditure as % of GDP*Source: Fry 1974.*

Year	Domestic revenue %	Government expenditure % of GDP
1935	6	6
1940	7	10
1945	3	3
1950	3	4
1955	5	5
1960	7	9
1965	6	7
1970	7	8

Table 5: Defence and security as % of the ordinary budget and transport and communication as % of development expenditure*Source: Fry 1974.*

Year	Defence and security as % of ordinary budget	Transport and communication as % of development expenditure
1952-53	38-42	0
1954-64	26-42	22-62
1965-72	29-38	15-23

Table 6: Financing of government expenditure*Source: Rubin 1995*

	Domestic (excluding gas)	Sales of gas	Foreign aid	Domestic borrowing
1952	74	0	18	8
1955	102	0	9	-11
1960	38	0	53	9
1965	49	0	52	-1
1970	61	9	23	7
1975	63	12	31	4
1980	50	33	28	-11
1988	24	6	32	44

It could be argued that at least part of the aristocracy viewed the emergence of an industrial bourgeoisie with suspicion or outright hostility. This was not only the case with Daoud and his circle; other Prime Ministers like Shah Mahmoud also tried to turn Zabuli into a scapegoat for the economic crisis of the mid-1940s. When Daoud nationalised many of Zabuli's assets without indemnity in the 1950s, few surged to defend the country's most successful entrepreneur. These nationalisations marked the end of the first phase of industrial development in Afghanistan. Between the early 1930s and 1950, 40,000 jobs had been created in industry; between the 1950 and the late 1970s few jobs were added despite massive

amounts of development aid flocking to Afghanistan in those very years (Gentelle 1980: 286-7). The adoption of more liberal economic policies in the late 1960s and of incentives for the creation of industries failed to add much impetus due to their focus on import substitution, which had little multiplier effect not least due to the fragmentation of the economy (Fry 1974: 54). The farming industry was no exception. After Amanullah's experiments with model farms in the 1920s aimed at improving the productivity of agriculture, little more was done. From the 1950s there were huge externally funded investments in the creation of dams and irrigation systems, but foreign experts were surprised by the lack of any interest in investments aimed at exploiting the huge potential of these dams (Haider and Nicolas 2006: 71). Agricultural productivity was stagnant between 1957 and 1973. Only the trading sector seems to have done well in the 1960s, largely due to the building of better roads (Fry 1974: 52, 47-8).

The elite, however, was not completely uninterested in ways of accelerating its own accumulation of capital. The big landlord estates around Kandahar and Herat were already turning to commercial agriculture in the nineteenth century, leading to the gradual formation of an agricultural labourer class. By the 1960s and 1970s, a similar process was going on in some other parts of the country, for example Nangarhar (Anderson 1978). A trend towards class formation was also reported in relatively remote areas such as Sar-i Pul (Tapper 1983). However, these processes were limited in scale and not very advanced. Many of the landlords belonged to the royal family and had little incentive to seek alternative sources of revenue. Rural development projects funded by foreign countries were limited to remote small farming areas, which did not have the leverage to attract serious attention from Kabul. As far as industrial development was concerned, many members of the elite were stakeholders in Zabuli's companies (Saikal 2004: 107) but despite this did not act as a lobby in favour of a more business-friendly political environment. While the hostility of the aristocracy to the rise of an independent industrial and financial bourgeoisie is not surprising, it is not clear why they did not try more assertively to take the lead in the modernisation of the economic base of the country, particularly the creation of industries. The lack of education and of familiarity with the external world among the ranks of the aristocracy might in part be an explanation for this in the 1930s and 1940s, hence the reliance on more experienced businessmen like Zabuli (see below). From the 1950s, little private investment was taking place anyway because of Prime Minister Daoud's hostility to private enterprise. Perhaps more importantly, the tribal character of the aristocracy meant that it was culturally bound to a model of revenue redistribution (geared towards maintaining a retinue and local support) that constrained accumulation. Interestingly, after the aristocracy was driven into exile by the coups of 1973 and 1978 and the subsequent series of civil conflicts, it started engaging in business activities abroad.

Reactions to drought and food crises, which were increasingly frequent after 1930, were always short term ones. The contradictions of the policy of very slow and limited modernisation were beginning to become apparent by the last couple of years of Hashim's rule: in 1942-3 the rising gap between demographic growth and agricultural production forced the government to import wheat for the first time, while at the same time non-agricultural GDP was stagnating (Ghobar 1967). The impact of this on the state budget was soon to become a major issue, but the government was slow in realising this. After giving in to the pressure of the conservative, landlord and mullah-dominated parliament of 1949 and abolishing the obligatory sale of wheat by farmers, the Prime Minister was faced with a food crisis and rising inflation. The response was to abolish the compulsory cultivation of cotton, hoping that this move would lead to higher levels of food production (Haider and Nicolas

2006). The only significant efforts towards the development of an industrial base took place in the 1930s and 1940s, when monopolies were granted to entrepreneurs considered close to the aristocratic elite and caravan trade was banned. This resulted in a form of protection for domestic industry, at least until more roads were built from the 1950s onwards, but the decision was also determined by the desire to channel trade through the few custom points that existed and collect duties there. It is worth mentioning in this regard that the Afghan state was particularly cash-strapped in the 1940s (see Table 4). However, the cost to the frontier tribes and to remote areas of the countryside that were only accessible to the caravan traders was considerable. In 1942 alone a 60% decline in the caravan trade was estimated (Balland 1988; Haider and Nicolas 2006: 80). This development marked the beginning of the crisis of the nomadic and tribal economy, despite the fact that the Afghan state never managed to fully control external trade, with smuggling still accounting for 40% of it by the 1970s (Gentelle 1980: 288). Even if we interpret the support granted to industry in the 1930s and 1940s as motivated by the desire to stimulate economic development, clearly there was still no intention of cultivating an open economy and the rise of an independent class of industrialists, as the monopoly regime and its patronage networks show rather eloquently. The fact that Zabuli emerged prepotently as by far the dominant figure within the Afghan entrepreneurial class was the unwanted result of his unparalleled contacts in the NEP-era Soviet Union¹⁰ and in Germany, as well as being due to his own personal skills. The state itself was in such a dire financial state that Zabuli was even entrusted with the task of establishing a national bank with funds gathered among the business community (Zabuli 1982). Only in 1950 would the Ministry of Finance establish control over the central bank. As Zabuli's economic power expanded, his political influence grew too, soon turning him into a dangerous 'state within the state' according to his critics (Zabuli 1982; Akram 2001).

The economic policies of the Afghan elite condemned a country of already limited economic prospects to stagnation. Due to the limited potential and the technical and political difficulty of raising sufficient land and livestock taxes, in the 1930s an increasingly cash-strapped government started shifting towards customs and indirect taxes. Already within that decade land and livestock tax declined to just a third of total revenue. Inevitably, the potential for higher revenues from customs was also limited in a stagnant economy. When Daoud launched his ambitious modernisation programs, the only real option available in the short term was obtaining aid from external sources. In 1952 direct taxes still accounted for 31% of revenue; in 1973, the figure was down to 9%. By the late 1950s over 40% of state expenditure derived from revenue accruing from abroad (see Table 6) (Rubin 1995). In the short and medium term, reliance on foreign aid stabilised Afghanistan and made it possible to carry out reforms that had previously been vehemently opposed (Rubin 1995: 62). The growing dependency of Afghanistan on external help also represented a further incentive to privilege the formation of the façade of a 'modern bureaucratic state' over the substance of such a state. The bureaucratisation and institutionalisation of the regime saw little substantial progress throughout the period up to 1978, and it remained largely arbitrary and unaccountable (Habib and Nicolas 2006). The limited modernisation of agriculture prevented the rural economy from supporting a growing village population, and exports would have been difficult in any case due to limited facilities. The growing demographic pressure that resulted from these failures led to migration into the cities, compounding the problem of urban unemployment (Etienne 1972: 239).

¹⁰ Zabuli was forced to abandon his economic activities there once Stalin started to eliminate independent business.

Until the 1880s Afghan rulers interfered little with property rights, leaving it up to society to self-regulate. From the time of Abdur Rahman, however, this changed. The 'Iron Amir' often forced informal bankers and rich people to hand over money to him, particularly when they had been doing business with the King's political enemies, which caused the flight of capital and businessmen from the country. Similarly, heavy taxes were imposed on shops during the first part of his reign. In later years, Abdur Rahman became more lenient, but he also established state monopolies on several major items of trade. Traders benefited from improved internal security, but on the whole trade declined during his reign. This predatory and patrimonial attitude towards the business sector resurfaced periodically in Afghanistan, for example under Daoud in the guise of 'nationalisations', although his relations with the business world improved in the 1970s. It is interesting to note that the leftist regime established in 1978 did not have bad relations with businessmen. Zabuli is known to have donated a substantial part of his wealth to the government in 1978. Moreover, in the 1980s some other leading businessmen were appointed senators by virtue of their 'national role'. In line with its claim to be carrying out a national-democratic revolution, the regime targeted big landlords, most of whom were expropriated. By the late 1980s, however, the regime was also trying to pacify them by offering to return part of the land. Land reform had largely been a failure due to the violence that had prevented farmers from benefiting from the land redistributed to them.

State collapse 1978-1996

A constant feature of the old (imperial) model of the Afghan state was its reliance on 'divide and rule' tactics, which in practice translated into mobilising communities against each other. The subnational administration was either recruited locally among individuals with little support base in order to make them dependent on the central government, or from outsiders chosen not according to any meritocratic criteria but because they were cronies of top ranking members of the elite (Rubin 1995: 43). Provincial boundaries were drawn in such a way as to divide communities and create multi-ethnic and multi-tribal administrative units, making it difficult for the local population to come together and influence or oppose government (see Map 4). The resulting system was resilient in its own way, because by turning sections of the population into minorities within their local context, it bound them to the central state, on which their fate was dependent. Local leaders coopted by the government were similarly dependent on government support in order to maintain their status. At the same time, the system was highly unstable in that it was breeding conflict in the long term. It also complicated the task of ruling the country, making it dependent on highly effective leadership and complicating the establishment of a bureaucratised administration. For example, the Kohdaman revolt of 1930 had been caused by the abuses of the government functionaries, who wanted to punish locals who supported Habibullah II (Azimi 1998: 35). The 'peasant' revolt of Harazajat in 1952 has also been attributed to the abuses of the state administration (Davydov 1967: 162). In this case, the revolt was immediate because the population was still well armed following the civil war, but my hypothesis is that elsewhere the 'imperial' system of oppression and exclusion and the patrimonial system of administration were slowly preparing the ground for future explosions, should the opportunity arise. Such opportunities were sometimes provided by an internal crisis of the ruling elite, as happened repeatedly during the nineteenth century. Sometimes the opportunity was provided by external interference. Whenever the Afghan state ceased to play the role of buffer between neighbouring states, or worse still turned into a threat to them, it proved relatively easy for outsiders to arm disaffected sections of the population against Kabul. The civil war of 1928-9 provides a good example of what could happen in the event of a crisis of state power. The

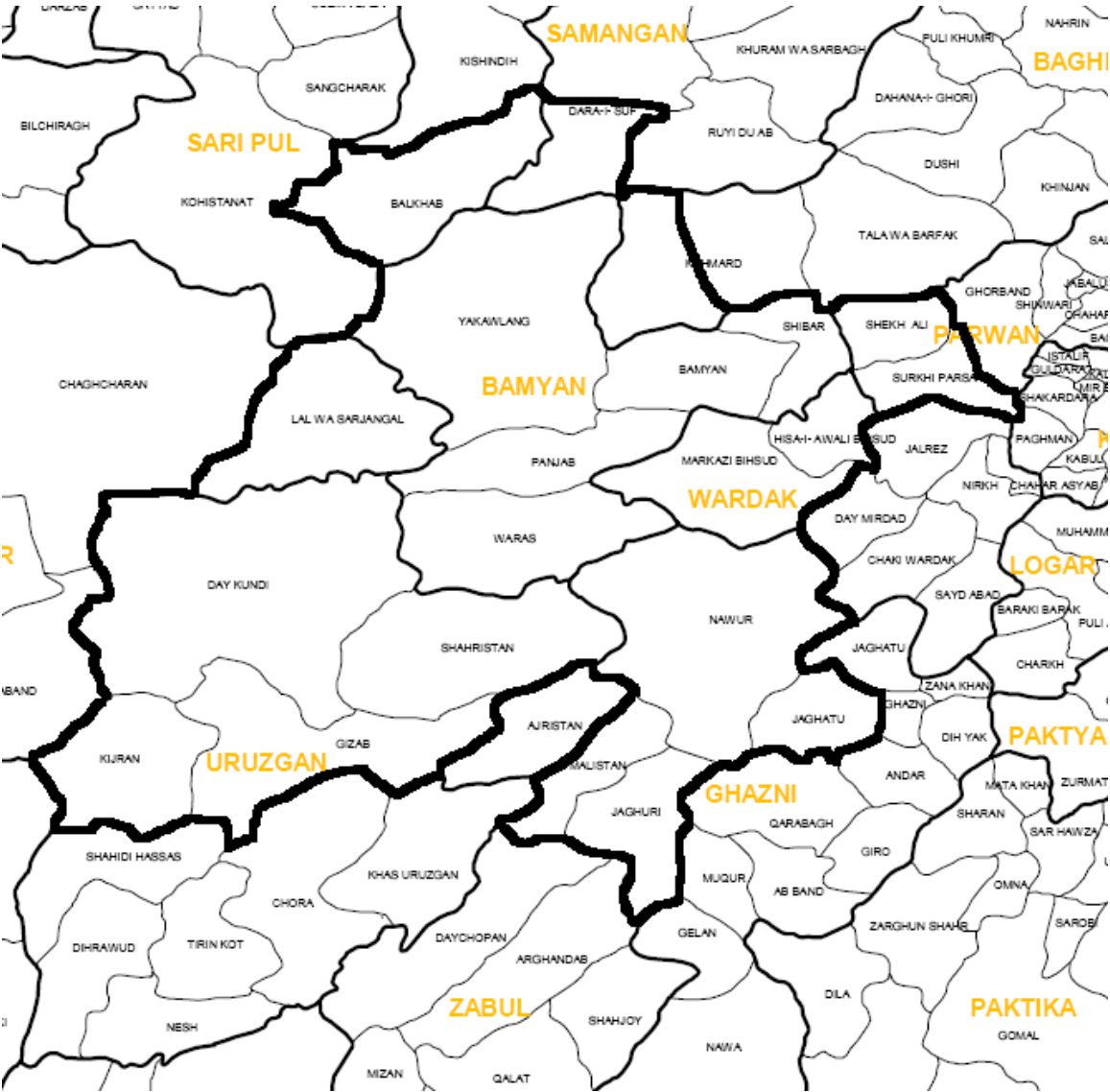
short duration of the crisis (9 months) prevented the process of disintegration from going too far, but the signs of collapse were all there. In this sense it is true that the 1928-9 civil war foreshadowed the crisis of the 1980s (Rubin 1995: 57).

As the first generation to experience mass education to university level, the majority of the graduates of the 1950s and 1960s were not just upset with the aristocracy but with their own fathers too. Modern education created a 'generational and emotional gap' and a 'social distance' between the college leavers and the previous generation (Rubin 1995: 76). However, to explain the process of collapse after 1978, the emergence of a radical intelligentsia is not sufficient. It could be argued that if the intelligentsia had been reasonably united it might well have stayed in power after 1978. At least up to the Soviet intervention, the military situation did not appear critical despite several purges of the officer ranks; only remote areas of little strategic value had fallen in the hands of the rebels (Kakar 1995).¹¹ The Afghan army, for all its limitations, was still a sufficient tool for maintaining internal control in the absence of large-scale external intervention. Even if it is now known that US and Pakistani aid to the insurgents started earlier than the Soviet intervention,¹² it was not on a large enough scale to tip the balance between government and opposition.

¹¹ Interviews with former officials of the Khalqi government and with former jihadi commanders in different provinces.

¹² Interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser, in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Paris, 15-21 January 1998.

Map 4: Administrative units of Hazarajat, the territory populated by Shia Hazaras in Afghanistan. Bamyan was the only province with a large majority of Hazaras; the remaining Hazara districts were distributed among eight other provinces, including Sheikh Ali and Surkhi Parsa in Parwan.



The line splitting the intelligentsia is usually discussed in general terms: by the late 1970s, it mainly pitted two pro-Soviet factions against each other – Khalq and Parcham. The latter was more moderate and urban based, while the former more radical and rural (Arnold 1983). The Maoists had by then lost much of the influence which they had enjoyed in the early 1970s because their internal splits and sectarianism (Emadi 2001). The ethno-nationalists had lost ground because of their weak organisational capabilities and had in any case always been bitterly divided between Pashtun, Tajik and Hazara nationalists. The Islamists had suffered heavily under Daoud and had been unable to proselytise in the cities and universities since the early 1970s. They were reduced to little more than a nuisance by 1978. Hence, a unified HDK (Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq) with Khalq and Parcham cooperating with each other might well have stayed in power. Instead, by the second half of 1978 Khalq had already proceeded to purge Parcham from the government and military apparatus. Khalq, which from the beginning

had enjoyed control over the key positions by virtue of its leading role in the military coup that had eliminated Daoud from power, was alone in power before the end of the year. Soon, however, Khalq too started fragmenting between the followers of President Taraki and Prime Minister Amin. By September 1979, Amin had physically eliminated Taraki and proclaimed himself President.

Three and a half months later Amin was killed by the Soviets, who replaced him with the leader of Parcham, Babrak Karmal. In short, what undid Amin was the readiness of Taraki's followers and the Parchamis to appeal to a foreign power to redress the internal balance of power. Without the readiness of these two groups to cooperate with the Soviets, it is extremely unlikely that the Soviet Army would have entered the country. The existing literature does not address satisfactorily the issue of why the Afghan leftist intelligentsia was so strongly inclined to factionalism, so this hypothesis will have to be tested through field research. One possible hypothesis is that the 1978 coup took place at a stage when the intelligentsia was still far from having merged into a homogeneous unit and was still ridden by urban-rural and regional rivalries, which then favoured the disintegration of the ruling leftist party from 1978 onwards. Another aspect that has not been properly studied is the mechanisms leading to the near disintegration of state control during 1980 – that is once the Soviet Army had entered the country. Although it is clear that a major mobilisation occurred inside the country and the number of armed opponents increased dramatically, as did the geographical spread of the insurgency, the exact dynamics remain somewhat obscure. The standard interpretation of the resistance as a typical Afghan nationalist or xenophobic reaction to foreigners is not the result of any serious research effort, but of mere speculation. As pointed out above, Afghans have not always rejected foreign occupation *per se*. My hypothesis is that even if the aims of the Soviet intervention as it had been conceived in the Kremlin were limited to achieving a change of leadership and stabilising the situation, it was perceived locally as an attempt to sponsor and strengthen the Khalqis' attempt to alter the social status quo in Afghanistan. This led to massive resistance in what was perceived as a struggle for survival. At the same time, a nationalist reaction does seem to have occurred within the ranks of the state apparatus, leading to the defection of a number of army officers and state functionaries and perhaps more importantly to a drastic decline in the commitment and motivation of those who stayed in. As a result the state structure was greatly weakened at a time when revolt was exploding in the countryside.

The revolt had already started in the summer of 1978, with Islamist groups infiltrating guerrillas across the border with Pakistan; but the entry of local communities, tribal groups and the clergy into the dissidence was a protracted affair, which started in late 1978 and continued until 1981 at least. It was initially remote areas like Nuristan and some districts of Paktia that revolted against Kabul. This was certainly in part due to the fact that government presence was weakest there, but in some cases (certainly Nuristan, and later Hazarajat too) there seems to have been a problem of miscommunication. It has been pointed out that while the Khalqis should have had a relatively good network in much of the countryside due to the presence of many teachers in their ranks, after the Saur 'revolution' members of the party hurried towards the capital in order to position themselves for a good job in the state apparatus. Soon many young and inexperienced individuals who were rarely carefully screened were left to run things in the provinces. Most of them had no networks or contacts, particularly in areas where Khalq had always had a weak or non-existent presence, like Nuristan or Hazarajat. Communicating with local communities therefore became difficult and small incidents could escalate into major problems (Shahrani and Canfield 1984; Roy 1990; Dorronsoro 2005; Dupree 1959-). My hypothesis is that many opportunists, interested mostly

in material gain for themselves and their communities or clans, joined Khalq and earned positions at the subnational level. While this was not unusual for Afghanistan's subnational administrations, the newcomers were 'hungrier' than their immediate predecessors, who had had years to consolidate their positions. The social reforms launched by the government contributed to complicating the situation and to offering opportunities for bad local administrators to misbehave. The land reforms in particular seem to have been widely abused in many areas as an opportunity for the redistribution of land among clans, rather than between big landlords and poor or landless peasants (Giustozzi 2000). The majority of the members of the land reform teams were not even members of the party and there were allegedly many Maoists figured among them. The debate over the degree of radicalism of the land reform decree (Vercellin 1979; Roy 1990) is therefore rather pointless: while it might well be true that the reform itself was not very radical, its actual implementation was often a direct challenge to whole communities. Of the other reforms, the most challenging one was the abolition of bride price, the impact of which was intensified by the contemporary forced introduction of mixed male-female classes in schools. Together, these two initiatives conveyed to conservative villagers the idea that an attempt to change their way of life was going on. Finally, the Khalqis in Kabul decided to take preventive action against real and presumed enemies and started arresting them en masse. Cadres of hostile political parties (Maoists, Islamists and soon Parchamis too), clerics and members of the aristocracy were arrested and many of them executed. The execution of clerics had a particularly strong impact because of the strength and spread of clerical networks that reached deep into the countryside. Strongly motivated by the Khalqi's direct attack, once again the mullahs and the Sufis figured as a prominent force in the rebellion, particularly although not exclusively among the Pashtun tribes (Roy 1990; Dorronsoro 2005).

Although the Soviet intervention set in motion the process of collapse of the Afghan state, at the same time it also froze this process: Soviet troops guarded key cities and roads and allowed a modicum of state apparatus to continue to operate. After the initial Soviet plan to withdraw within 6 months was demonstrated to be unworkable because of the degrading situation, the Kremlin decided to stay as long as was needed to rebuild a friendly regime that would be able to sustain itself without Soviet presence (but presumably with large scale aid). By 1985 little progress had been made in this direction, due to the massive support received by the resistance from both the US and Arab sponsors (Coll 2004; Yousaf and Adkin 2001), but also to the internal contradictions of the pro-Soviet regime. It is now well established that Soviet presence was attracting a lot of help for the opposition, not only from US sources, but from both Arab states and wealthy individuals as well. Hence the opposition had little interest or incentive in even discussing a settlement. Only politically marginal elements, more or less excluded from the distribution of patronage emanating from the opposition leaders based in Pakistan, proved amenable to local deals with the regime (Giustozzi 2000). To this explanation I shall add my hypothesis that another important reason for this failure to improve the situation was that the Soviet presence contradicted the very aim of building a stronger state in Afghanistan. The nationalist elements within the state structure, who would have been those with the strongest commitment to working towards the strengthening of the state, were put off by the presence of the Soviets. Many denied their cooperation, fled the country or even cooperated with the enemy by supplying information and/or sabotaging the war effort. As a result, the government of Karmal never had the strength to penetrate deep into the countryside and inflict decisive defeats on its enemies. Soviet help in reorganising, re-arming and re-training the armed forces, as well as a greater degree of meritocracy in appointments at the top, could only improve the situation to a limited extent. The cities were secured (Kabul by 1983, Mazar by 1982, Herat by 1986 and Kandahar by 1987; Jalalabad had never been

infiltrated) and the highways were kept open, although some trouble spots remained (mainly the Salang pass). But the Soviets would not commit themselves to the fighting for the countryside, which was largely left to the government army, security forces and police. The Soviets only committed themselves to an effort to seal the border using interdiction and special troops, and this did not achieve much (Halliday 1998; Giustozzi 2000).

A key aspect of the Parchami-Khalqi coalition's effort to re-establish state control over most of Afghanistan was the creation of a security organisation named initially KhAD and renamed WAD in 1986 when it was promoted to full ministerial status. Somewhere in between Cheka and the KGB in nature, KhAD/WAD was allocated huge amounts of resources to gather intelligence and prevent the enemy's infiltration of state agencies, but also increasingly to fight the counter-insurgency. In fact it could be argued that by the second half of the 1980s most of the counter-insurgency effort was on KhAD/WAD's shoulders. However, the creation of specialist counter-guerrilla battalions and of special security units to protect key facilities was not the main aspect of KhAD/WAD's role. The focus of the agency's effort was to recruit rural militias from among the ranks of the insurgents and use them to expand the government's influence over the villages. The recruitment pattern remained slow until 1989, probably because few leaders of non-state armed groups were willing to make deals with a government they thought was likely to be doomed in the long run. Also, deals with the government in the presence of a Soviet army would have discredited the local leaders with the clergy and its closest followers (Giustozzi 2000).

The Soviet withdrawal of 1988-89 was decided mainly on the basis of wider international political considerations, but in terms of studying the resilience of the Afghan state this event offers multiple points of interest. A large scale (although not universal) onslaught occurred in 1989 when, under pressure from their leader in Peshawar, opposition commanders launched a general offensive to bring down the HDK regime. Both the Soviets and President Najibullah, who had replaced Karmal in 1986, knew that this was a key moment: if the regime managed to survive the onslaught for at least a few months, it would have earned some degree of legitimacy on the battlefield (Giustozzi 2000). The opposition, disappointed with its failure to overwhelm a regime branded as a mere puppet of Moscow, would then fragment and become unable to act in a coordinated fashion. This expectation proved correct and Najibullah's regime survived the 1989 onslaught, despite some shaky moments. After this the number of opposition commanders ready to sign deals with Kabul increased exponentially. Najibullah, however, remained heavily dependent on Soviet patronage for his regime's survival. As long as that patronage was in place, the regime was rather solid. For example, it survived a coup attempt of Defence Minister Tanai in 1990 unscathed. For this reason the August 1991 coup in Moscow sounded like a death knell in Kabul. The main successors to the Soviet leadership – Russian President Yeltsin and Vice-president Rutskoi – had already made clear their support for opposition figures such as Prof. Rabbani and had stated that they would terminate aid to Najibullah's regime. During the last four months of 1991 aid to Afghanistan had already virtually stopped, in part because Russia was already starting to take over from the Soviet Union and in part because of the chaos and disintegration of the latter. Although Najibullah's regime had abundant reserves of military hardware and supplies, it was short of fuel and food supplies as well as of cash. More importantly still, within the regime's support base many started scrambling to find alternative sources of support or to form alliances with old enemies. By early 1992 there were clear signs of the regime's disintegration. Najibullah attempted to consolidate his hold on the regions by appointing trusted men in key positions in the military hierarchy, presumably to strengthen his hand in terms of the UN intervention he had invoked to negotiate a peaceful settlement. The consolidation effort, however, backfired badly. The

northern militias and army units, mostly under the control of commanders hostile to Najibullah and often with ethno-nationalist leanings, did not accept the appointment of Najibullah's loyalists (all of whom were Pashtuns) and openly revolted. In alliance with part of the Islamist opposition, they quickly seized control of northern Afghanistan, with the north-east falling to the Islamists. Najibullah, now crucially weakened, lost his hold on his own party in Kabul, forcing him to abandon power. The Peshawar-based opposition, in alliance with segments of the armed forces of the regime, proceeded to occupy Kabul (Walwalji 2000/1).

In part, the revolts that started in 1978 had much in common with previous patterns of revolt in Afghanistan. However, there were differences too. Tribal and community participation happened initially along similar lines. The mobilisation of the clergy had been key to all of the previous revolts, but for the first time in 1978-9 the intelligentsia also played a part in influencing some of the Islamist and Maoist activists. It might be possible to speak even of the first signs of a formation of national sentiment among the semi-educated, although very little research has been done on this. This limited but not insignificant participation of the intelligentsia in the revolts was sufficient to lead to changes in the structure of the insurgency. The activists introduced a political technology of mobilisation,¹³ which while insufficient to produce a 'modern insurgency' still resulted in a mixed and sometimes syncretistic insurgency incorporating tribal elements, strongmen and warlords, modern guerrillas in the style of Che Guevara and political parties inspired by the Maoist or Leninist models. Some of the 'not-so-modern' actors were themselves evolving rapidly. Warlords in particular proved very apt at incorporating modern elements like organisation, administration and propaganda. This meant that they were more effective militarily than the strongmen's armies of the nineteenth century. Combined with the supply of abundant and technologically advanced weaponry by Arabs and Americans, this meant that the state lost technological and organisational edge (Interviews with former jihadi commanders 2003-7; Roy 1990; Dorronsoro 2005; Rubin 1995).

The nature and composition of the opposition changed during the war. A first major change concerned the composition of the main organisations involved in it: even as early as 1979, many revolts had not been 'spontaneous' local ones but had been organised insurrections of Islamist¹⁴ activists who had mostly infiltrated from Pakistan. The role of the Islamist parties grew during the 1979-1989 period, as they were better organised than either the monarchist or the fundamentalist groups and were better able to channel resources to their fighters on the ground. Allegedly, they also received the lions' share of US and Arab aid. However, given the small number of ideologically trained and conscious activists available (estimated at 1,100 in 1979), the expansion of these parties could only happen at the price of diluting the ideological 'purity' of their rank and file. Increasingly, local and regional warlords, tribal strongmen, opportunistic community leaders and conservative fundamentalists found their way to the ranks of the Islamists. The capabilities of the political leadership based in Peshawar was inevitably going to suffer from this development, even if approaches to recruitment and management of field commanders differed between leaders. The penetration of the Islamist parties, as well as the other opposition groups, by warlords and strongmen had a limited impact as long the conflict with the Soviets and subsequently with the Najibullah government was still going on; however, it emerged as a key factor contributing to state disintegration in

¹³ This refers to propaganda techniques that are easily reproducible.

¹⁴ I adopt in this text O. Roy's distinction between Islamist and fundamentalist. Islamists are those Islamic revivalist groups that aim at the conquest of the state, whereas fundamentalists seek to create their own niche away from the state and limit themselves to changing society from below.

1992, as the Peshawar and the Mashad-based groups established themselves in Kabul and tried to form a coalition government.

The second major change was the emergence during the war of a new military class and of a class of strongmen rooted in the villages. The leaders of the original revolts, be they landlords, highway robbers, party activists or tribal leaders, were gradually replaced by leaders who were more effective in leading men into battle (warlords) or at least in gathering armed men around themselves (strongmen) and also at extracting the resources necessary for the continuation of the war. The devastation caused by the war undermined the role of landed elites and rural notables, who had initially funded the uprisings. The new class soon started moving beyond their military and security role and tried to seize control of land and other assets, as well as seeking political influence. While this process was not very evident in the midst of the conflict, it would become a major issue after 1992 and even more so after 2001.

The 1992-1994 period in Afghanistan was one of chaos and civil war, as the opposition factions failed to form an effective coalition government and started fighting each other. This period is not well studied and there is no consensus among scholars with regard to the causes of the start of the civil war. A key factor appears to have been the decision taken by the Defence Minister Ahmad Shah Massoud – appointed in 1992 by the tentative coalition government – to effectively allow the army inherited from Najibullah to disintegrate. He could not have entirely prevented this development even if he had wanted to, as much of the country was out of his reach and he did not have the resources to keep paying all the troops. However, in the north, in Kabul and in the region surrounding the capital, Massoud could have made an effort to maintain the army. Apparently worried that an army still largely staffed by former affiliates of the HDK could represent a threat or at least provide the basis for a claim to a share of political power by factions of the HDK, Massoud opted to absorb equipment and selected units or individuals into his own forces, on the basis of existing relationships and personal trust. This choice however made it easier for the leading army mutineer from the north, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, to attract a sizeable chunk of that army to his side and supply it by accessing the huge depots of equipment existing in Hairatan, on the border with Uzbekistan. In addition, other chunks of the army had been absorbed in the militias of Hizb-i Wahdat, while Hizb-i Islami also had sizeable militias; it is clear therefore that the government coalition centred around Massoud's Jami'at-i Islami and a few smaller allies was very far from enjoying a monopoly of armed force (Davis 1993).

The Jami'ati regime (1992-1996) displayed many of the characteristics of its predecessors, namely the tendency towards ethnic or tribal 'retrenchment', despite all statements to the contrary. Jami'at was itself divided between the supporters of Rabbani and those of Massoud. The former included both fellow Badakhshani from Yaftab and other districts of that province, and Jami'ati functionaries who had served at Rabbani's court in Peshawar, as well as an assortment of local commanders and warlords. Massoud's included mainly Panjshiris along with Massoud's associated military commanders in north-eastern Afghanistan (Saikal 2004: 218-9). A issue that remains unclear is why the Jami'at-dominated government did not seriously try to include the other factions, instead seeming inclined to keep them out. indeed, mutual distrust and the lack of a reliable broker might have been important causes of the start of the civil war. Hizb-i Islami started fighting against the government just a few months after the seizure of Kabul, unhappy about the assimilation of Najibullah's militias into the new

regime. Soon Hizb-i Wahdat, the party representing the Hazara minority, also joined Hizb-i Islami on the grounds that the power sharing offer coming from Kabul was unsatisfactory.¹⁵

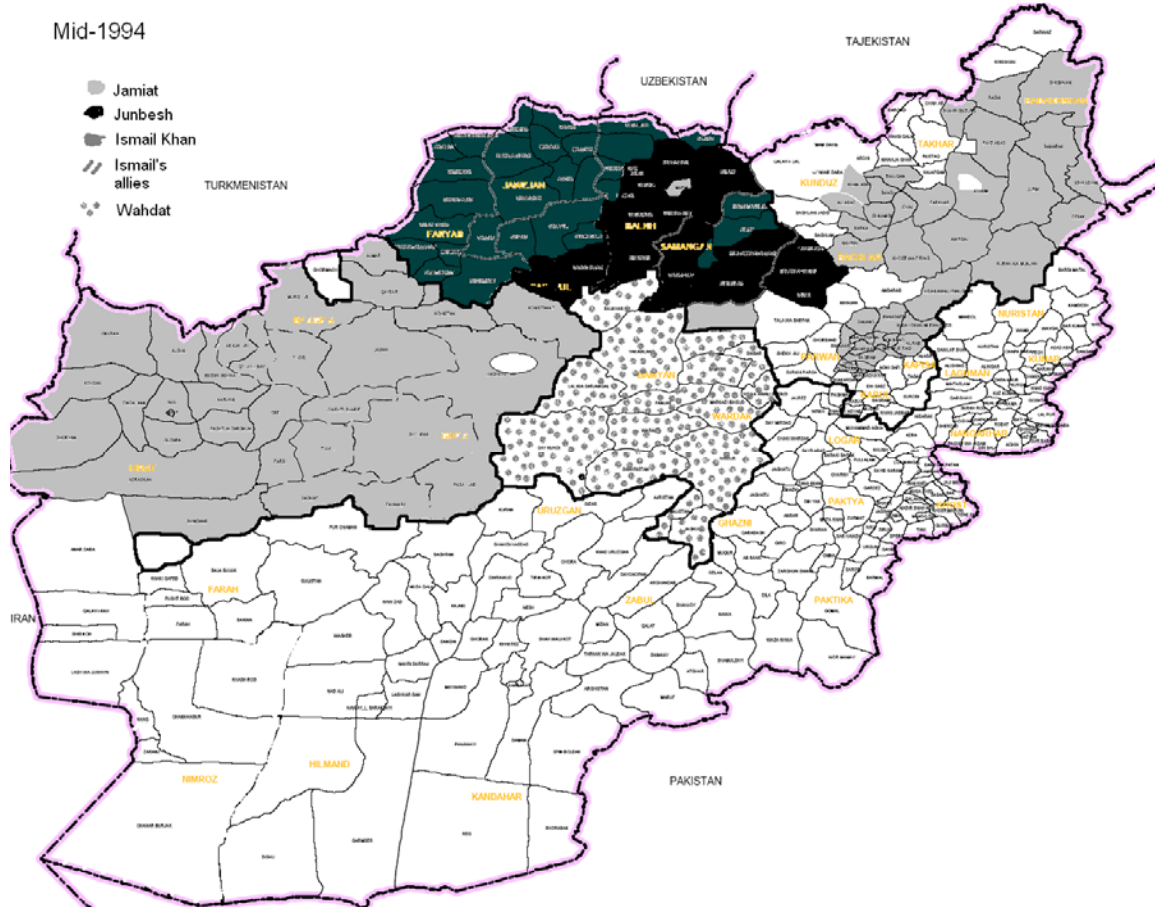
The attempt by the UN to impose itself might have been a decisive moment had it been successful, although it is far from clear whether all parties in the conflict would have accepted a UN brokerage. In early 1992 the attempt by the UN to secure a share of power for HDK representatives had proved unacceptable to other players.¹⁶ In 1993-4 Junbesh-i Milli, a movement formed by General Dostum with other generals as well as remnants of the HDK and other leftist groups, demanded to be recognised as an equal partner in the central government, but its requests were always refused due to the past collaboration of its leading members with the HDK regime. Eventually, Dostum – who had been an uneasy external ally of the Jami'at-centred coalition in Kabul – defected to the opposition coalition centred around Hizb-i Islami, marking the beginning of the second phase of the civil war, which lasted from 1994 to 1996 without either side being able to gain a clear supremacy. Jami'at and its allies managed to consolidate their hold on Kabul after a conflict that destroyed much of the city but did not succeed in making major gains in other regions. The opposing forces roughly matched each other in size and equipment; each had regional fiefdoms and none had a nationwide presence; each had foreign support, but none had significantly more than the others; and finally they all resembled each other in that they recruited mainly among the ranks of the military class that emerged during the 1978-1992 war. If the balance had to be broken, a new force had to enter the scene with different characteristics.

At this stage the clergy had largely abandoned the political scene, despite the fact that the government was inclined to hand over control of the judiciary to them. While the west, north, centre, north-east and Kabul region were under factional control (see Map 5), the south and south-east were in a rather chaotic state. The tribal strongmen who inherited control of these two regions in 1992 proved completely unable to manage them and they were overwhelmed by a wave of lawlessness.

¹⁵ There is no fully satisfying account of the civil war period yet. Chronologies and early attempts to analyse this are offered by Gelinas 2000, Roy 1995, Saikal 2004, Maley 2002, 2006,, Knyazev 2002 and Atseer 2005. See also Christensen 1995.

¹⁶ Accounts of UN involvement in the Afghan negotiations are given by Corwin 1992, Cordovez and Harrison 1995, and Khan 1991.

Map 5: Areas controlled by the main factions in 1994



Source: based on Giustozzi, 2009 forthcoming.

It was this situation that prompted a section of the clergy into action – a section that was initially limited to a small group of former fighters in the area of Kandahar but then rapidly evolved into a much larger movement, which became known as the ‘Taliban’. Initially underestimated by the other players on the Afghan scene, the Taliban expanded rapidly due to the support of the clergy and to the popular desire for order and security. Additional support derived from their declared aim of bringing back the deposed king, Zahir Shah. Once the Taliban had seized control of the south and the south-east and started moving towards Kabul, they began to be perceived as a serious threat, or as a worthwhile ally. Both the Kabul government, Hizb-i Islami and Dostum negotiated separately with the Taliban at different stages, but it does not appear likely that the Taliban seriously meant to strike a deal with any of them at any time; they were just playing divide and rule. Kabul fell in October 1996 and by 1998 only the mountainous north-eastern corner of Afghanistan was still resisting the Taliban. With 90% of the country under their control, the Taliban could claim to have reunified the country (Rashid 2000; Griffin 2001; Marsden 2002). The reasons for their startling success are not easy to assess. They were not particularly proficient on the battlefield, although they did improve over time. Their tactical leadership was less than mediocre and they were easily outmanoeuvred by the more experienced among their enemies (Davis 1998). Pakistani help did not exceed Iranian or Russian help until 1999. Thousands of Pakistani and Muslim volunteers from third countries fought in their ranks and might have been more motivated than the average Afghan fighter, but this too happened mainly after Kabul fell in their hands. My hypothesis is that their ability to claim religious legitimacy, a factor to which the support of the clergy contributed significantly, was key to their success.

State reconstruction 1996-2007

At the end of 1998, once the Taliban had control of 90% of Afghanistan, they made a bid to achieve international recognition. Only Pakistan, the UAE and Saudi Arabia recognised them, but a number of other governments flirted with this possibility. The Taliban government appointed unofficial representatives to major countries in the region and in the world, as well as to the UN. In terms of re-establishing a working Afghan state, the Taliban's ideas seem to have been pretty simple. Religious law and madrasa-trained religious judges provided a judiciary; state administration was cut to a minimum both in Kabul and in the provinces; no state budget existed; the educational system was cut down to religious madrasas and a limited number of state schools, very few of which admitted girls (Interviews with tribal notables and former Taliban officials 2005-7). In short, Afghanistan reverted to the pre-Amanullah period; except for the army, which was based on a somewhat original model. In terms of financial sustainability, the Taliban state was certainly more viable than its predecessors. However, this does not mean that it was more sustainable from a political standpoint. As the security threat and chaos receded in the mind of ordinary Afghans as the foremost concern, the Taliban regime started coming under pressure to meet certain 'developmental' needs of the population. Taliban officials were soon looking for some international legitimacy and offered to ban the opium poppy harvest in exchange for international aid and possibly diplomatic recognition. They even implemented bans on the cultivation of the poppies, beginning with a partial one in 1999 and then expanding this to a complete one in 2000 (Labrousse 2005). While the bulk of their resources were dedicated to the military effort, the Taliban did carry out a few improvements or repairs to the badly shaken infrastructure of the country. In 1999, following complaints about the isolation of the country by relatives of the many Afghans residing abroad, they decided to re-establish a postal service, which had collapsed in 1992, and to establish a provisional telephone service with Pakistani numbers. They also started negotiations about the establishment of a mobile telephone service and showed keen interest in a gas pipeline project linking Turkmenistan to Pakistan.

It would also be mistaken to think that the Taliban were completely alienated from the intelligentsia. Because of the lack of alternatives, many educated Afghans who probably despised the Taliban worked for them in the administration and in the armed forces. These, however, cannot be considered as 'allies' of the Taliban as they were motivated by coercion or by economic need; again, it was subaltern coalition-building. However there were many intellectuals, mostly Pashtun nationalists, who saw in the Taliban the only possibility of preserving the integrity of the Afghan state and therefore supported them, albeit critically. Many of these supporters were residing outside Afghanistan, while others were inside the country. In general, the greater the geographical distance, the more enthusiastic the support. The Taliban's segregationist policies towards women were highly displeasing to secular Afghans and were amongst the main bones of contention between specialists, administrative staff and intellectuals on one side and the Taliban on the other. Moreover, the Taliban themselves were divided between moderate and radical elements, with the latter being dominant. Moderates like Mullah Rabbani were nevertheless able to argue for the inclusion of as many educated people as possible in the administration in order to improve its effectiveness; but at no stage were members of the intelligentsia able to emerge from their roles of technical staff or advisers and play a political role within the Taliban regime (Interviews with members of the intelligentsia and former Taliban officials 2005-6).

The Taliban regime was not at all inclusive. Its leadership, both at the national and subnational level, was entirely composed of mullahs, the overwhelming majority of whom were Pashtuns. Furthermore, there was an overrepresentation of Pashtuns from the Ghilzai

tribes, mainly at the expense of the eastern tribes (Johnson and Mason 2007). It can be speculated that, given time, the Taliban would have come under increasing pressure to modify their regime in the direction of a greater inclusiveness, both in social (intelligentsia), gender (women) and ethnic terms. Another aspect of their regime was its isolation from the rest of the world (certainly the western hemisphere), in the intellectual or psychological sense even more than physically. In this regard, the events of 2001 demonstrated that while it might be possible to build a state on the cheap, it is not advisable to save on some good foreign policy advisors. Although little information is available on what actually happened inside the leadership of the Taliban during those crucial weeks following the attacks on New York, it would seem that the Taliban failed to recognise the seriousness of the situation and continued to pay excessive respect to Pashtun notions of hospitality and Islamic concepts of brotherhood.¹⁷ My hypothesis is that a line of continuity can be seen throughout Afghan history, linking Amanullah, Daoud, the Khalqis, Rabbani and Massoud and the Taliban: an understanding of foreign policy constraints is not optional for the leadership of a state like Afghanistan, and its lack throughout the country's recent history has repeatedly contributed to the crisis of the Afghan state.

The new post-Taliban regime was established at the end of 2001 under international sponsorship and particularly that of the United States and of the United Nations (Chesterman 2002; Conte 2005). The regime initially took the shape of a coalition, with the militias of Jami'at-i Islami¹⁸ and moderate royalists at the centre, the latter being willing to sacrifice the re-establishment of the monarchy for a share of power. Other groups were given relatively marginal shares, with the exception of the Taliban, who despite some half-hearted efforts in their favour by the Pakistani authorities were given none. The transitional President, Hamid Karzai, was one of the royalists ready to sacrifice the monarchy under American pressure and initially had the support of the Jami'atis, who were by then formally splitting into two factions: one led by veteran leader Prof. Rabbani and another led by the 'young Turks' of the party, a new generation of non-clerical leaders who had emerged around the late commander Massoud (Saikal 2004). However divided the Jami'atis might have been, they agreed on marginalising their former allies in the anti-Taliban United Front: the mainly Uzbek Junbesh-i Milli of General Dostum and the Hazara-dominated party, Hizb-i Wahdat, which was also in the process of splitting into four different factions. The fragmentation of the old United Front played to the advantage of Karzai and his circle, which gradually enlarged to include Pashtun nationalists and segments of Hizb-i Islami, along with former royalists and a declining number of Jami'atis. Initially, Karzai seemed unable to confront effectively the Jami'ati factions, which had claimed control of two key ministries (defence and interior) as well as of the intelligence directorate. Once he had settled the monarchy/republic debate in favour of the latter with the 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga, Karzai largely succeeded in recovering the support of the more resilient monarchists, who had initially committed themselves to one last bid to re-establish the monarchy.

Once elected with 55% of the votes in 2004, Karzai felt strong enough to move against the Jami'atis and the more resilient factions of Hizb-i Wahdat. In fact, he had already inflicted the first blows in the months preceding the elections, while trying to mobilise the Pashtun vote behind himself. In particular Mohammad Fahim, the dominant figure among the 'young Turks' of Jami'at, known as the Shura-i Nezar group, was dropped from Karzai's presidential ticket in August 2004. He tried to react by organising a pronunciamiento of military units

¹⁷ For a description of a similar situation in 1998-9 from a Pakistani diplomatic source involved in the negotiations following the terrorist attacks on US embassies in Africa, see Murshed 2006: 292 ff.

¹⁸ One of the two main Afghan Islamist parties, the other being Hizb-i Islami.

based in and around the capital, largely composed of Jami'ati militias. However, he failed to gather sufficient support and had to graciously concede to Karzai. The deployment of a multinational peacekeeping force in Kabul in 2002 clearly played an important role in preventing a *pronunciamento*, or worse still a coup. However, it appeared obvious by 2004 that Fahim's status among the militias had been largely eroded because of his failure to deliver sufficient patronage to them while at the same time being highly successful at enriching himself (Interviews with UN officials and foreign diplomats 2004-5).

Karzai's regime could not have been more different from that of the Taliban. While the latter was almost autarchic and was hostile to foreign influences with the exception of a few Arab and Pakistani 'friends', Karzai's was almost entirely dependent on external support for its survival, not only militarily but also financially. In addition to the development budget, which was completely funded by foreign sources, the operational budget was initially almost completely paid for by donors.¹⁹ The economic policies of the regime seemed to accept this state of dependency as a long-term prospect and implicitly also accepted the growing role played in the economy by the narcotics trade. No effort was made to develop an industrial base. As of early 2007 the government was unable to provide more than a few hours of electricity each day, even in the capital. The custom duties were set so low as to afford no protection to indigenous manufacturers against Iranian and Chinese goods, which started flooding the market (Giustozzi 2006). The artisanal sector of the economy, already long in decline, suffered a major blow from the import of very cheap Chinese consumer goods and clothes. The regime was also willing to accept external influences in the drafting of its constitution and laws. One of the few exceptions was electoral law; in this case, against the advice of the majority of foreign experts Karzai insisted on excluding political parties from any significant role (NDI 2005). The underlying assumption seems to have been that Afghanistan could only be rescued by a massive international intervention and that the country therefore had to completely surrender to it. I suggest that this hypothesis could at least in part be demonstrated by an analysis of Karzai's cabinets to identify key players, continuity and change. Once the core group is identified, their agenda and relationship with external players could emerge more clearly. A further question to be answered is whether there are (in continuity with previous regimes) signs of an extremely unsophisticated approach to foreign policy, ranging from the naïve expectation that Afghanistan would be saved by some generous country (or the 'international community') to unmitigated xenophobia once it became apparent that such hopes were deluded.

Voter turnout in the presidential and parliamentary elections was relatively high, even taking into account some cheating, especially with regard to female participation. However, while Afghans seem to have appreciated this opportunity of making their opinions known, it remains open to question how legitimising an electoral process can be in a context such as the Afghan one. My hypothesis is that while welcome to most Afghans, participatory elections were not seen by them as a key legitimising aspect of state-building. In part, this might be due to the fact that a complicated electoral system was chosen by a narrow circle around Karzai and their international partners, which remained obscure to the population and even to most candidates. The voting process in the rural areas was mainly directed by local communities or local rulers, such as warlords, militias and strongmen. Moreover in the southern half of the country in particular, Karzai was the overwhelming choice of the voters in the expectation that he would help local communities resolve their problems, thanks to his access to aid money and to his promises to support every single community. However, Karzai could not

¹⁹ Internal revenue covered only 18% of the operating budget in 2002/3 (World Bank 2005).

possibly have satisfied everybody. In this sense the decline in his popularity recorded in 2005-6 was already implicit in his electoral victory. Even the propaganda opinion polls organised by groups aligned with the Bush administration or with the Karzai regime showed a decline in Karzai's popularity during 2006 (Giustozzi 2007b).

In part due to the artificial choice between leaderships in Bonn (2001) and in part due to the state of fragmentation of the country after the fall of the Taliban regime, the new ruling elite faced significant difficulties in extending its control beyond Kabul. In practice it had to rely on alliances with local warlords, strongmen and party militias in order to have even a modest influence. However, such alliances were often uneasy, not least because the government did not renounce future efforts towards centralisation sponsored by its international partners, which funded projects to eradicate the poppy fields, to train police staff and to rebuild a national army (Giustozzi 2004a). Various measures were taken by the central government to weaken the hold of the local allies without incurring a direct confrontation, such as frequent rotations of local leaders from one position to another, often moving them between provinces. After 2004, many of the former warlords, strongmen and militia commanders were dismissed from their positions altogether, except in parts of southern Afghanistan where the local power players were mostly personally close to President Karzai. As a result, the relationship between Karzai and his erstwhile allies deteriorated over time. Although after 2004 a substantial number of governors and other officials with no background in non-state armed groups were appointed, they tended to have little influence and power due to the continuing presence of those non-state armed militias, as well as to the infiltration of the police by the same militias (Interviews with police officers and government administrators 2003-7).²⁰

The reconstruction process was rapidly bogged down by a series of internal contradictions. Although much of the debate focused on why Afghanistan was receiving less aid than a number of other countries, particularly in the Balkans, more recently a number of authors have highlighted problems such as the limited capacity of the Afghan state, widespread corruption, and lack of coordination in the multi-national and multi-agency effort (Maley 2006; Donini et al. 2004; Johnson and Leslie 2004; Rubin 2006). Official figures show that on average during 2005-6 Afghan ministries could only spend 50% of the money allocated to them.²¹ On top of these deficiencies and technical difficulties, my hypothesis is that the international intervention by external donor agencies and NGOs contributed to weakening the legitimacy of the Karzai administration and removed any incentive to improve the capabilities and skills within the administration.

The ongoing crisis 2002-2007

The debate about the resurgence of the Taliban as a serious threat to the Karzai regime is still far from having reached a consensus. There is agreement on some points, namely the fact that the insurgents receive help from across the Pakistani border, although the extent of the involvement of the Pakistani authorities is difficult to determine. With abundant funds coming from Arab and other Muslim countries, it is unlikely that the insurgents need much direct support from Pakistan. However, the Neo-Taliban have also demonstrated an ability to penetrate deep into Afghanistan and recruit villagers. Claims by the authorities and NATO that the Taliban mainly rely on mercenaries who join for the cash do not hold when the intensity of the fighting is examined; nor do some analyses that attribute the Taliban's success

²⁰ Interviews with police officers and government administrators, 2003-7.

²¹ According to some estimates, the figure could actually be as low as 10% (House of Lords debate, Tuesday 10 October 2006).

in recruitment to tribal motivations. There is now sufficient evidence that the insurgency is the result of the aggressive and predatory behaviour of local authorities, which has antagonised individuals and groups who have no connection with Kabul, particularly those who had been cooperating more closely with the Taliban when they were in power in the capital (Giustozzi 2007b). This explanation is in line with what has already been argued in this paper concerning previous revolts against central power in Afghanistan. The 'imperial' model of state, in other words, remains the dominant model in Afghanistan. The intensification of foreign intervention since 2006, with the deployment of larger numbers of troops in the south, was accompanied by an intensification of the war. My hypothesis is that as in 1980 the village notables and the clergy interpreted this deployment as aimed at strengthening negative trends that were already affecting their status and wealth. Similarly, local communities interpreted the recent deployment as being intended to strengthen the repression to which they were already being subjected.

The insurgency was not the only crisis faced by the Karzai administration after 2001. The survival of many elements of the 'imperial' state in Afghanistan combined with the after-effects of the long years of war and the new electoral politics to stimulate the rise of ethnic politics (Schetter 2003). In reality, the political manipulation of ethnicity has a long history in Afghanistan. As early as the 1920s, some of Amanullah's circle had highlighted particular external influences (mainly Turkey) and identified the need for rooting the new state in a shared identity and language. Hashim Khan and his circle developed these ideas further in the different context of the 1930s. Given the mistrust towards both the British Empire and the Soviet Union, Germany appeared to much of the Afghan intelligentsia – and to the ruling elite even more so – as a potentially more friendly partner. Indeed even before the arrival of the National-socialists in power, Germany had tried to develop contacts with Afghanistan and had involved itself with some development and education projects (Nicosia 1997). German involvement increased after 1933. Some scholars believe that the new Hitlerian regime viewed Afghanistan as a useful strategic platform for operations against both the Soviets and the British, although some others disagree. Either way, to consolidate the German-Afghan friendship the Germans invested energy in propagating their racial theories and in promoting theories concerning the 'Aryan' origins of the Pashtuns and at least some Tajiks (Schlagintweit 1997; Fleury 1997; Azimi 1998: 35; Hauner 1982; Adamec 1974). As this period was the early stage of development of the Afghan intelligentsia, such theories left a mark that can still be seen in the twenty-first century. Other ethno-political theories surfaced during the 1960s, as young Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras went through the educational system and were exposed to efforts to present Indo-europeans as a superior race. The expropriation of Tajik and Uzbek khans in northern Afghanistan to make room for the deported Pashtun tribes had also created a current of ethnically based resentment. As a result, both theories concerning the Asian distinctiveness of Uzbeks and Hazaras and theories of ethnic oppression by Pashtuns started becoming popular among the intelligentsia of the minorities in the provinces and sometimes even in Kabul (Interviews with Afghan intellectuals 2005-6). My hypothesis is that the political groups and the theories formed in these years never gained a mass following at the time but would later begin to influence warlords and militia commanders during the 1990s. After 2001 the introduction of competitive elections stimulated political parties and individual candidates to seek popular support using, among other arguments, concepts of ethnic discrimination, both among the minorities and the Pashtun majority. The tendency of political organisations to be limited to particular areas of the country and to have constituencies mainly limited to a particular ethnic group gave additional impetus to this trend. As a result the parliament elected in 2005, while ethnically balanced on the whole, was characterised by the presence of political groups that were mostly

homogenous ethnically, even if few of them professed an explicit ethnic ideology. This could arguably one day represent a threat to the integrity of the Afghan state, particularly if the political leadership is perceived to be weak and failing.

Table 7: Main Politico-Military Groups in Afghanistan, January 2006

Source: Giustozzi 2007d

Name	Leader	Motivation/ background	Ethnic background (in %)					
			Pashtun	Tajik	Hazara	Uzbek	Turkmen	Other
Jami'at-i Islami (Islamic Society)	Rabbani	Ideological - Islamist	6.0	86.0	2.0	2.0	-	4.0
Junbesh-i Milli Islami (National Movement)	Dostum	Regional - secular	-	-	-	91.0	9.0	-
Hizb-i Wahdat (Unity Party)	Khalili	Ethnic - Religious Shiite Khomeinist	-	-	100.0	-	-	-
Dawat-i Islami (Islamic Movement)	Sayyaf	Ideological - fundamentalist	100.0	-	-	-	-	-
Harakat-i Islami (Islamic Movement)	Mohseni	Religious - Shiite traditionalist	-	50.0	50.0	-	-	-
Hizb-i Islami * (Islamic Party)	Hekmatyar	Ideological - Islamist	66.5	25.5	-	4.0	-	4.0
Mahaz-i Milli (National Front)	Gailani	Sectarian - Royalist, Sufi	100.0	-	-	-	-	-

Ethnic background is based on ethnicity of current members / sympathizers elected to Parliament

Ethnic breakdown based on MPs with former links to party, rather than current.

Military organisation 1934-2006

Unsurprisingly given the recent civil war, Nadir Khan invested heavily in rebuilding a large army from 1930, which reached 70,000 men in 1933-4. A new military academy was established and new military equipment was received from the British or purchased on credit from Germany. Although the army was seen as better disciplined than Amanullah's, its first trial in 1930 against the Kohdaman rebellion saw the army defeated and thrown back. Nadir had to mobilise tribal levies to defeat the rebellion (Gregorian 1969: 297; Azimi 1998: 20). After 1933 Prime Minister Hashim Khan continued Nadir's policy of privileging the strengthening of the army, which throughout his premiership absorbed around 50% of government expenditure. By 1941 the army had overtaken Abdur Rahman's in size, with 90,000 regular troops. The police and gendarmerie were also reorganised on a military-style basis (Gregorian 1969: 371).

By the mid-1950s, with the delivery of Soviet tanks and jet combat planes, the Afghan army was finally able to put down any local revolt relatively quickly, at least in areas accessible by road. The last tribal revolt of the pre-1978 period was easily crushed in 1955. Nonetheless, the army continued to suffer from major problems. The rank-and-file remained unmotivated

to fight. This might have been in part due to the dire living conditions of the troops and the strict disciplinarian system, but even more important was the fact that while all the key positions were in the hands of Pashtuns, the majority of the rank-and-file were from ethnic minorities. Due to widespread exemption from service among the tribesmen of the south-east and east, Hazaras and Uzbeks alone formed as much as 50% of the soldiers and low-ranking officers, despite accounting for less than 25% of the population (Azimi 1998). Corruption was widespread among the officer corps and in the military courts (Azimi 1998: 39-40). The practice of appointing aristocrats and cronies of prime ministers and royals as high-ranking officers continued unabated, resulting in the majority of the top brass still being incompetent and often even illiterate (Azimi 1998: 26-7). Apart from the resulting inferior performance of the army in the field, this bias had other important consequences. The growth of the intelligentsia and the consolidation of military training as one of the few avenues of social climbing for bright youth of humble social origins soon led to tensions. Because the top positions were only available to the cronies of key members of the elite, the new generation of military academy trained officers grew increasingly frustrated (Azimi 1998). This is probably the key to the remarkable success achieved by radical organisations – particularly those of the left – in recruiting army officers. Even some generals and the commander of Daoud's guard were sympathisers or members of leftist groups. The fact that many officers were trained in the Soviet Union contributed to strengthen leftist tendencies, but this aspect seems to have been overestimated by some scholars. About 10-15% of the officer corps were trained in the USSR (Azimi 1998: 62), which is a large figure but still not as large as is claimed by some authors. Many clandestine members of the leftist parties had not been trained in the USSR. As the first to invest in mobilising these frustrated officers behind themselves, Khalq and Parcham were well established by the time other groups tried to compete too; indeed by 1978 Khalq and Parcham were the two dominant groups, particularly among senior officers. Nationalists, Maoists and Islamists had some following among more junior officers (Azimi 1998: 98).

Khalqi military officers overthrew Daoud and seized power in April 1978. Almost immediately a purge of the armed forces started, with officers associated with Khalq enjoying rapid promotion. The purge of Parchamis started during the summer and led to even more rapid promotion, which might have contributed to the motivation of the Khalqis in the ranks of the armed forces to fight hard for the regime but also compromised whatever professionalism the army had achieved thus far. It might also have compromised the legitimacy of the military institution in the eyes of non-Khalqis, whether officers or not. The developments of 1978-9 remain rather obscure, in particular with regard to the degree to which the security situation was deteriorating, and some specific research effort might be warranted to throw light on this period. Preliminary evidence, however, suggests while the deterioration was significant, it was not threatening the existence of the regime in Kabul (Interviews with former Khalqi and Parchami officials, 2005-7).

It appears clear that a major turn for the worse occurred in coincidence with the arrival of Soviet troops, or to be more precise starting from a couple of months after that. Violence started in the countryside in summer-autumn 1978, gradually intensifying and spreading from 1978-1981, and throughout this period keeping enlisted men in the ranks proved a major challenge. Most rank-and-file were reluctant to engage in an ideological war and pressure to return home and protect one's own family must have been high. The lack of any sense of nationhood, which as indicated earlier had resulted in the use of discipline as the main tool to keep soldiers in the ranks, also led the troops to defect at the first opportunity. There is little indication that the majority went over to the rebels; in fact the large majority of those leaving

the army were trying to reunite with their family or simply stay out of the conflict. The army nearly disintegrated despite efforts to draft in as many recruits as possible, while at the same time the insurgency escalated in the countryside.

My first hypothesis is that widespread violence represented a major disincentive for soldiers to stay in the army, while at the same time foreign occupation antagonised officers, driving some of them to defect and others to adopt a non-cooperative attitude. There is some evidence of this in Soviet/Russian literature, but further research will be needed. My second hypothesis is that the objective difficulty of finding soldiers and making them fight for aims towards which they were at best indifferent were compounded by rivalries internal to the regime installed by the Soviets at the end of 1979. By and large the regime was a coalition of Parcham and anti-Amin elements from Khalq, with the former holding the upper hand. The latter were resentful at having been given a smaller share of power than they had expected and many among the rank-and-file were nostalgic for the time (under Amin) when all power was concentrated in their own hands. The controversy between the two wings of the party was aggravated by the fact that the Khalqis maintained control not only over the police but also over the army, despite all attempts by the Parchamis to dislodge them. The Soviets had to act as mediators between the two, but in the end had to accept that the rivalry would not end and adopted institutional engineering as a way to balance the regime. The security services were given a military component, which became of greater and greater importance over time, while the army was deprived of sufficient access to manpower and a border force was created out of it, dividing the chain of command (Giustozzi 2000). This certainly contributed to the stabilisation of the regime (the military component of the security services defeated the coup attempt in 1990), but also negatively affected its ability to fight the insurgency. From the mid-1980s the focus of the counter-insurgency shifted once again towards the creation of irregular forces or militias. The main advantage of militias was the ease of recruitment; militiamen were serving in their villages and were protecting their families as well as earning a good wage. Moreover, they were *de facto* granted territorial control over sizeable areas, where they could extract revenue through taxes and a variety of other means. In a sense the process could be described as a trend towards the ‘feudalisation’ of the state. Compared to previous attempts to use militias and irregulars, this time there was an attempt to frame them in a structure and give them incentives to gradually ‘civilise’ their behaviour, with the aim of eventually turning them into semi-regular forces; but the results were disappointing. In order to motivate the commanders to carry out their own recruitment and also to reward those who were most successful on the battlefield, the regime was forced to grant territorial control to these militias. The system was therefore heavily reliant on the availability of plenty of patronage to maintain its stability, and of course the necessary resources could only come from the Soviet Union (Giustozzi 2000).

The army of the Taliban represented to a large extent a reversion to the irregular formations of the pre-Abdur Rahman period. Such formations, however, were not limited to those of the Taliban, as over time the other factions involved in the civil war increasingly tended to degrade into semi-trained or completely untrained militias, even when at the start they had incorporated significant numbers of regular troops (Giustozzi, 2004b). Once in control of Kabul, the Taliban invested some energy in enlisting the remnants of the regular armed forces such as tankists, air force pilots and mechanics, artillerymen and communication specialists, as well as in training their own core supporters in handling sophisticated military equipment. In general, the Taliban did not try to improve the technological level of their army; on the whole they used what they had inherited from previous governments and mostly limited themselves to purchasing spare parts. Their main ‘innovation’ was the large scale use of

pickup trucks in battle (rather than merely as a means of transport), a fact which is in itself revealing of their attitude. Policing was carried out with modest forces and relied on the draconian punishments of the shariah; most provinces were garrisoned by a few hundred Taliban and yet no major disturbance arose in the southern half of Afghanistan until the last days of the regime. My hypothesis about the solidity of the Taliban state is that although there seems to have been widespread opposition to the Taliban among what was left of local notables and intelligentsia, they were not able to act as they were not networked beyond the village level, or at least not beyond comparatively small areas of the country. The support of the clergy therefore allowed the Taliban to prevent revolts because the opposition was unable to mobilise on a large scale without them. Apart from the north-east, armed opposition was limited to a few pockets in Faryab, Samangan and Bamian provinces until the last few months of 2001. In non-Pashtun regions, given the stronger hostility towards the Taliban, the regime relied on alliances with warlords and strongmen formerly affiliated with Junbesh, Hizb, Wahdat or Jami'at to control territory (Interviews with tribal notables, former Taliban officials and members of the intelligentsia, 2004-7).

In part, their awareness of the limitation of the resources available might be behind the Taliban's downsizing of the administration and their desire to keep the armed forces 'simple'. However, there is no evidence that they sought large scale patronage from friendly countries such as Saudi Arabia. Hence, their inclination towards 'simplicity' might have been at least in part ideologically motivated. The austerity of the Taliban probably derived from the influence exercised by the Deobandi school, from whose madrasas many of them came (Roy 2000; Dorransoro 2000).

The attempt to rebuild an Afghan army started yet again in 2002, but this process was very slow due to a series of international political considerations. The new army rapidly ran into recruitment and desertion problems and its combat effectiveness was no less problematic than that of its predecessors, despite the embedding of trainers and a large scale construction programme to provide better facilities than ever (Giustozzi 2007a.). Between 2002-2005, the main forces under the command of the Ministry of Defence were the former anti-Taliban militias, which were gradually disbanded through a controversial DDR program (Sedra 2006; Özerdem 2002; Giustozzi 2008).

Until the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan, law enforcement was in the hands of local notables, who controlled gangs of armed 'bandits' and offered protection in exchange for money. Abdur Rahman intervened heavily and over the course of 15 years established something more closely resembling a national police force, relying to a large extent on its own spying network and on the use of torture. In the countryside Abdur Rahman used a sort of militia called *khassadars* (Kakar 1979: 48-54). The system he established was already beginning to decline under Habibullah I and even more so under Amanullah, when corruption was reportedly widespread within the police. Nadir Shah rebuilt the police once again from scratch and PM Mohammad Hashim strengthened it, placing it under the control of the Ministry of Interior. A professional police force started to be established in the 1930s with the help of German advisors, who have continued their assistance into the twenty-first century despite some interruption (1940s, 1950s, 1980-90s). More accurately described as a militarised gendarmerie than a police force, it relied on conscription to fill its ranks and was deployed down to the sub-district level. Until the 1970s, this force seems to have been working quite effectively according to the reports of foreign travellers. However, petty bribery was common and the population was afraid of the police, being keenly aware that they were not 'servants of the public' but servants of the ruler. Moreover, tribal areas have

always been policed by the tribes themselves (Wilber 1956: 113-15). The experience of previous episodes of ferocious repression seems to have left its mark among the population, and a single unarmed policeman appears to have been able to visit most villages and impose his will without any trouble.

During the 1978-1992 conflict, the government maintained good control over the police force, which behaved in a disciplined way and does not seem to have been despised by the population; possibly because political repression was the task of the security services. Efforts to improve the credibility of the police as a professional force started in 1989, but the police force all but disappeared after 1992 and had to be rebuilt from scratch from 2002. Initially, the new force was entirely based on anti-Taliban militias drafted into the police, with disastrous results in terms of discipline and reliability. Programs were run to retrain the militiamen-turned-police, but with very modest results. At various stages the government tried to inject more professional policemen into the force, who were brought back into service from forced retirement; but this often faced opposition from the militiamen and their political patrons. Moreover, even as officers were partially replaced, the rank-and-file were still recruited from the ranks of the militiamen, making it difficult in most cases for the professionals to impose their views. There is evidence that the inefficiency and indiscipline of the police played an important role in turning large sections of the population away from the government and towards the insurgency (Giustozzi 2007b; Sedra 2006; Wilder 2007).

The legal system within the context of state-making

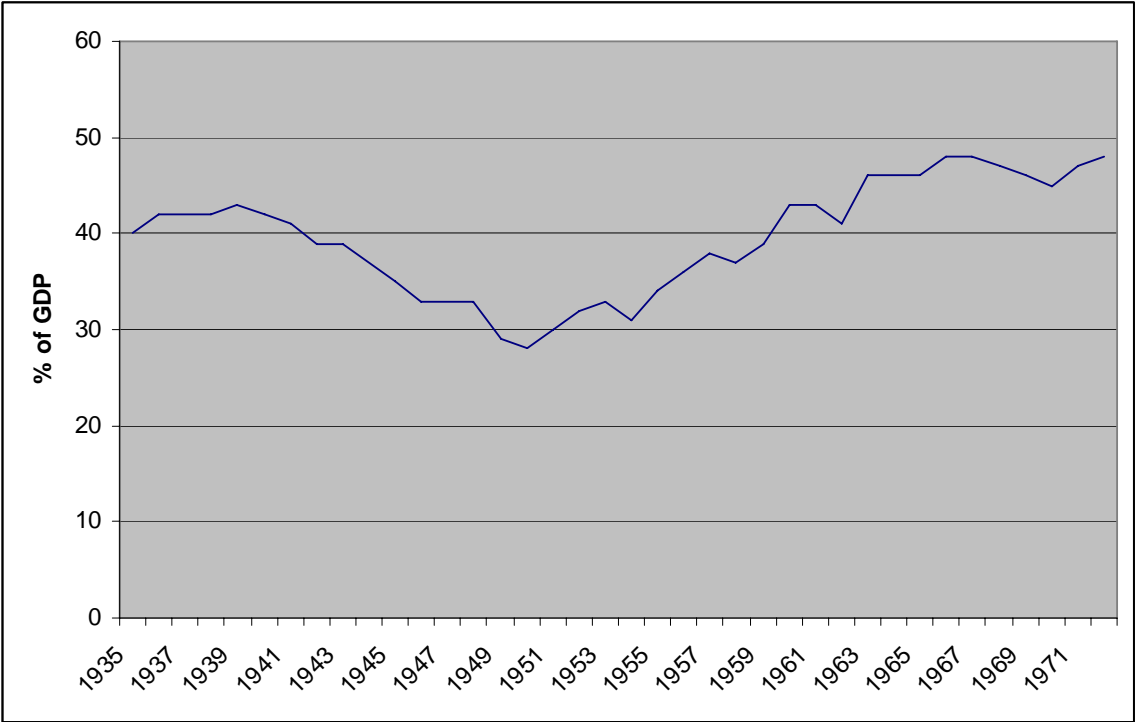
From the standpoint of the legal system, the main problem Afghan rulers have had to face was the management of different systems while at the same time expanding the use of modern codes of behaviour that were more compatible with modern economy and society. During most of the nineteenth century, religious and tribal codes coexisted, with the former dominating the cities and some non-tribal rural areas and the latter dominating the tribal strongholds of the south-east and east, as well as the south. Abdur Rahman tried to shift the legal system more decisively towards the shariah, but at the same time tried to impose state sponsorship on it (given that it had been autonomous previously). The 'nationalisation' of the religious judicial system created tensions between the government and clergy, sometimes escalating into open and violent confrontation; but at the same time it did contribute to legitimising the government. In practice, the space for the tribal codes was only marginally reduced; no serious attempt was made to replace them in the core tribal areas.

In 1920 Amanullah introduced for the first time western-style legal codes, although their implementation was limited due to the lack of trained judges. Significantly, however, the successor governments (excluding Habibullah II's) maintained these codes. Despite this, their implementation was diluted over a long period of time and they never really reached deep into the countryside; in the 1970s remote areas were still relying on either tribal or religious codes. New codes were promulgated in the 1960s and early 1970s, but this in itself did not lead to an acceleration of the expansion of the areas covered by secular law (Grevemeyer 1990: 171ff). My hypothesis is that the slow development of a national market appears to have been the main driving force behind the expansion of the application of these secular codes, drawing people from the countryside to the district centres in order to have issues resolved there (see Graph 1 for an indication of the development of a market economy). The government also made concerted efforts (except in the tribal areas) for criminal cases to be brought to the state courts. It would appear that civil and family cases were largely settled in non-state courts. The post-1978 crisis led to a weakening of the state courts, which collapsed almost entirely in

1992, leaving the field open once again to religious and tribal codes. The main innovation of the Taliban was a major push for the expansion of the religious courts based on the shariah at the expense of tribal codes, even in areas where the latter had always dominated. This attitude created serious tension between the regime and the tribes, certainly contributing to the tribes' disenchantment with the Taliban, who had been initially welcome (Interviews with tribal notables in Gardez, Kandahar and Jalalabad 2005-7).

Graph 1: The cash economy as percentage of GDP – an indicator of the development of a market economy in Afghanistan

Source: Fry 1974



Political economy of Afghanistan’s crises 1978-2006²²

The incorporation *tout court* of the leaders of non-state armed groups into the Afghan state administration after 2001 clearly demonstrated its corrosive effects on the structures of the already weak Afghan state, but these groups also played important roles as ‘robber barons’ in Afghanistan’s economy. They had already started playing an economic role after the collapse of the communist regime in April 1992. External support, which at a certain point might have been running to the tune of \$2 billion a year to all sides, rapidly faded and the military commanders increasingly faced the problem of how to fund their armies in the face of a declining propensity of the civilian population to contribute to the war effort (Rubin 2000; Harpviken 1997). At the same time, with the collapse of the central government a number of militia commanders paid by Kabul were made ‘orphans’, forcing them to join the guerrilla commanders in the search for sources of revenue. It is at this point that warlordism became a prominent feature of the Afghan conflict, even if its origins can be traced back to the early years of the war. Military commanders became autonomous from the political leadership and seized political roles for themselves, despite lacking in most cases any legitimacy to hold such positions. While it would be too far-fetched to argue that from this point onwards the war was

²² This section is based on Giustozzi 2007c.

driven solely by economic considerations, it is certainly true that revenue collection became an obsession for the factional leaders. This, in turn, affected their behaviour towards the civilian population; behaviour which became more predatory and stimulated their involvement with international criminal networks. Control of trade with neighbouring countries became an especially prized asset, although due to economic stagnation and even decline during the civil war customs revenue was far from being enough to fund the war effort. The process of appropriating state land also started in 1992 with the first post-communist government and continued unabated thereafter, with the only exception being the Taliban regime.

It was not only warlords and strongmen who established themselves as important players in the Afghan economy; a new generation of businessmen also emerged out of the series of civil wars of 1992-2001. To use a classification proposed by Jonathan Goodhand (Goodhand 2004), they were a product of the war economy and developed their own 'shadow' economy while also being instrumental in the war effort of various military factions. This is true especially, though by no means only, of northern Afghanistan. The older generation of pre-war business families survived to some extent, but mostly with greatly reduced influence and power. The 'new generation' sometimes suffered under the Taliban (especially the northerners), but because the nature of their businesses was different and more flexible than that of their predecessors, they managed on the whole to recover more quickly.

The end of the war in 2001 pushed the leaders of non-state armed groups to modify their priorities and start looking for ways to adapt to peace, both in terms of finding a place for themselves and in terms of reaping benefits from peace rather than war. The regional 'shadow economies' started at least in part coming out of the shade and developing in the sunshine. Most of the warlords and strongmen, especially the most powerful ones, opted to become politicians, eventually reaping their rewards in the 2005 parliamentary elections. They also started paying more attention to their financial activities and became more active in business, although usually only indirectly. Those who had made substantial savings could now look to invest their war coffers, as peace brought about a general economic recovery and offered new opportunities. It is likely that they viewed investment in Afghanistan as a way to consolidate their influence, given the patronage implicit in these investments. There are indications that the closeness of local strongmen and businessmen also contributed to the development of local monopolies in a number of sectors. A similar situation developed in relation to external trade. Once a privileged position was acquired, it proved very difficult for other businessmen to compete successfully. Access to Central Asian countries appears to have been particularly constrained by the need to establish personal connections. However, moving into business *en force* does not mean that other interests lost their pre-eminence. The strongmen remained as keen as ever to establish themselves as politicians (Author's interview with informer).

The partial conversion of Afghan strongmen into businessmen resembles in many ways the establishment of 'mafia' or organised crime networks, which are active both in the legal and the illegal economy and are able to use force to protect their interests and possibly to expand. There is mixed evidence with regard to the use of force or intimidation in furthering the interests of strongmen and organised crime networks in Afghanistan, depending on the economic sector and the region. Small trade, which is not a very profitable business due to overcrowding by very many minuscule players, is mainly targeted by the extortion racket, run in most cases by the police itself, which in turn is often controlled and led by the local strongmen (Simonetta Rossi, Personal communication). On the other hand, the building industry, larger-scale trading and fuel distribution – to name but three – appear to have been

affected in different ways: by attempts to enforce regional monopolies (fuel), to favour friendly businessmen over others (building industry), and to force traders to move into newly built complexes where they had to pay high rent and would be easier to control (city markets). The hold of the strongmen over key institutions (such as the police and local authorities) prepared the ground for processes of merging between legal and illegal sectors of the economy and between both of these and the authorities. In today's Afghanistan there are very few key players in the economic system who can genuinely claim to be immune from any contact with the illegal economy. For example the car trade, one of the largest business sectors, has been developing in contiguity with the shadow economy since cars are increasingly paid for by importers with drug money (Interview with US officers involved in the reform of Islam Qala customs, Herat, May 2005).²³

A particularly controversial area of activity for Afghanistan's strongmen is the narcotics trade. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the more powerful strongmen do not appear to be directly involved in promoting the cultivation of poppies. There appears to be hardly any need for it, since farmers are attracted by the comparatively high returns of the illegal crops and the actual work of recruiting them is done by the traders (Interview with former UN official, London, January 2006). Often farmers allege that local commanders forced them to grow poppies, but it is not clear whether these are genuine complaints or an attempt by farmers to shift the blame away from themselves (Interviews with farmers and local notables from Baghlan province, Kunduz, January-April 2004). On the other hand, there is significant evidence of the involvement of several strongmen and local commanders in the provision of security to the narco-traders and in the processing and smuggling of narcotics across Afghanistan's borders. The creation of a country-wide trafficking network appears to be a wholly new development in Afghanistan, though there have been other periods of large scale drug production in the country, particularly when the British Empire was protecting the opium trade and even before that (Misra 2004: 128). In the years before the war, poppy cultures were limited to some areas of Badakhshan (almost entirely for local consumption) and to the remote districts of Hilmand and Nangarhar, with production being a fraction of the level achieved from the 1990s onwards.

The illicit regulation, the closed monopolies and the protection rackets promoted by the strongmen might exactly be what 'robber barons' need for primitive accumulation. Moreover, there might even have been more widespread and direct benefits deriving from the growing business interests of the strongmen. An obvious one is that they removed any incentive to return to civil war. Together with their eagerness to play politics, these new business interests are also likely to have contributed to the rapid removal of most roadblocks between 2002 and 2003²⁴, which were previously used to collect illegal road taxes from road travellers (USIP 2004; Giustozzi 2007c). The road blocks were benefiting the smaller, local commanders more than the big strongmen, who appear to have invested some effort in convincing the smaller commanders to give way in this regard while continuing to collect land taxes in the villages.

In this context, interpretations such as Bayart's 'criminalisation of the state' (1993) look attractive, but the Chabal and Daloz (1999) model seems more acceptable to me in that it avoids the implicit bias of Bayart's: 'different forms of disorder that are more attuned to maintaining social bonds'. In other words, I would agree that the 'criminalisation' is part of a

²³ The linkages between the legal and the illegal economy appear to be expanding even beyond what is described in Ward and Byrd 2004: 27-31.

²⁴ Author's personal observations when travelling through Afghanistan. See also Country Information & Policy Unit, paragraph 6.61; Swedish Migration Board, p. 17.

political process of coalition formation and is just a recurrent characteristic of patrimonial polities.

It is important to point out that as the Afghan state entered the twenty-first century, it had still not completely shed the inheritance of the original imperial model. Successive governments continued to make widespread use of community-based militias to fight their enemies, the latter being in practice 'disloyal' communities who allied themselves with opposition groups. Karzai's government was no different in this regard. To various degrees, all Afghan governments failed to successfully play a regulatory role among local communities, showing instead the tendency to side with some at the expense of others. Until the 1960s, inter-elite rivalry in Afghanistan essentially pitted regional elites vs. a royal family which was attempting to increase centralisation. The period of relative peace of 1930-1978 was at least in part the result of Kabul's renunciation of any attempt to tax the provinces, at least directly, and of the slower pace of centralisation. The half-hearted attempt to selectively modernise the Afghan state only further complicated the picture, by superimposing new social classes such as an intelligentsia, a small working class and a trading class onto a rural society that was still very fragmented. The intelligentsia, which was virtually entirely dependent on state employment, was united in its desire to create a stronger Afghan state but was very divided on how to achieve this aim and on the characteristics that the Afghan state ought to possess.

A key question arising at this point is why the ruling elite did not accept the option of turning the state into a feudal structure and instead insisted on a centralisation project that led to recurrent crises. It is inevitably difficult to answer this question, but other examples of feudal states tend to show that feudalisation was based on the existence of a tightly knit elite, usually a warrior aristocracy, where strong personal relations and a degree of trust existed. Once such elites achieve the monopoly of force over society, they are able with relative ease to organise the distribution of power among themselves. In Afghanistan such tightly knit conquering elites never emerged; the closest thing to such an elite, the mujahidin leadership of 1992, was not tightly knit at all. At that time various proto-feudal arrangements were tried, but lack of trust and the heterogeneity of the elite made the task very difficult if not impossible. The centralisation of the Afghan state is, in other terms, a consequence of its patrimonial character.

Conclusion

Several authors, beginning with Weber and Eisenstadt, have pointed out how patrimonial rulers have often utilised political and administrative tools that were non-patrimonial and transcended the basis of their legitimacy in order to increase their ability to mobilise resources. Scholars have also often pointed out how patrimonialism still plays an important role in industrial societies, even if it is no longer the defining feature of the state. In this regard it is necessary to distinguish between patrimonialism as the legitimising principle of the state (i.e. the state is owned by the ruler(s) by right of conquest) and patrimonialism as tool of government. All states may use patrimonial tools, but only patrimonial states are defined by that use. In this sense patrimonialism and institutionalisation are not antinomies, just different tools of state-making and ruling. It is also useful to keep in mind the direct relationship between a certain kind of patrimonialism and charismatic leadership (Roth 1968: 194-206), which we could call charismatic patrimonialism. Charismatic leadership often requires a degree of patrimonial control in order to be empowered for decision-making. While institutionalisation serves to provide a degree of stability and predictability, charismatic patrimonialism provides the element of decisiveness and innovation required for fast,

effective political decision-making. In a sense, therefore, the two are complementary. Patrimonial rulers develop institutions to expand their mobilising power and the effectiveness of their polities, particularly against external threats. In this respect Tilly's theories about the role of war in state-building are fully confirmed by the Afghan case. War can kick off processes of social change that can undermine patrimonial legitimacy. However, patrimonialisation can still surface at the top of the state in contexts where institutionalisation has become an impediment to rapid and effective decision-making and reform. In Afghanistan, re-patrimonialisation was made even more likely by the fact that the military build-up did not spill over to the civilian sector. After Abdur Rahman's early investment in the sector, which launched proto-industrial development in Afghanistan, successive governments abandoned attempts at industrialisation and relied exclusively on hand-outs by external powers. The need to maximise resource mobilisation through institutionalisation and bureaucratisation was therefore weakened by reliance on external funding.

Once its original aims are achieved or lose importance, patrimonialism can be severed from charismatic leadership and can acquire a life and justification of its own, as strong interests coalesce around it that are not directly related to the existence of the state and the viability of leadership. In this situation we end up with elites that are not necessarily bent on developing their states, but rather focused on securing short-term survival and/or gain. This seems to have been the case in Afghanistan throughout most of the period under the monarchy and also after 1992. Since the state is an abstraction, it does not have aims *strictu sensu*; individual members of the ruling elite do have aims but these are unlikely to be long term, if for no other reason than that life is short. It is therefore unlikely that long-term development will be the conscious choice of rulers, unless they come to form a group with a strong *esprit du corps* and/or are highly ideological. Thus the creation of a bureaucratic, 'modern', 'Weberian' state in Afghanistan was the agenda of radical leftists and Islamist groups, but not of the ruling dynasty. If state-led developmental processes require a degree of ideological abstraction, they can only occur in non-ideological environments as unwanted consequences. Rulers might start 'modernisation' processes with limited aims (to have a stronger army, for example) and unwittingly set off much larger processes (such as the formation of an intelligentsia), eventually leading to their own demise.

Factors such as strong institutions and widespread entitlements have historically played a key role in stabilising states, but in certain circumstances they can come to be seen as obstacles by specific actors, even at the centre of the state. Reforms, for example, are rarely carried out through institutional processes, which is why revolutions tend to be led by charismatic leaders and often result in at least temporary (re-)patrimonialisation. In Afghanistan, this phase was that of the Saur 'revolution' (1978-9). Although it was initially bent on creating strong institutions and first and foremost a strong party, the new leadership soon came to see those same institutions – which could at least have prevented mutual slaughter in the political struggle – as instead impeding the resolution of political divergences among factions. The result was Amin's drive for personal power, supported by many within the party as a solution to the impasse. However, the combination of charismatic leadership and patrimonial politics often leads to an inherently unstable environment and can result in political crises, possibly even leading to the self-destruction of the state. The instability of the Khalq period (1978-9) was followed by a new phase of institution-building under Soviet sponsorship. This stabilised the centre of the state, but heavily institutionalised polities tend to be slow at decision-making as is shown by the democratic republic under Karmal (1980-1986). In those years Afghanistan reached the peak of institutionalisation, based on the Soviet model, which corresponded to a phase of paralysis in terms of decision-making. From 1986 onwards it

proved necessary to re-patrimonialise the state once again in order to allow for tough decisions to be taken. President Najibullah moved to weaken the country's key political institution (the HDK) and to strengthen his personal power in order to push through the reforms he deemed necessary. This allowed the regime to survive for some time but bred a new crisis in 1992, which Najibullah, deprived of Soviet patronage, was ultimately unable to control.

The Afghan example suggests in my view that we should free ourselves from a definition of the state in 'vulgar-Weberian'²⁵ terms. If states are a 'set of social relations', then a crisis of the state must be first and foremost a crisis of such social relations and it cannot successfully be measured with vulgar-Weberian indicators. The causes of the crisis can be economic, financial, political or ideological, for example – but only if the set of social relations that forms the basis of the state is destroyed will state collapse follow. Amongst other things this explains why certain states can be so resilient despite the degradation of most of their 'Weberian' features. Hence the importance of studying the set of social relations at the core of the state ('coalitional analysis'). It is also essential to look at the quality of such relations, ranging from loose alliances to solid 'power blocs', and to bring coercion back into the analytical framework, not as the opposite of coalition-building but as an ingredient of it. As the establishment of the Afghan state in the nineteenth century shows, 'coalition-building' is often an ideological construct through which elites consolidate their conquests and strengthen their legitimacy; it is not always the result of bargaining among social groups and political forces. In such cases we can therefore talk of 'coalition-building from the top' and subaltern coalition-building. One example is that of the leftist intelligentsia in post-1992 Afghanistan, which had to ally itself to the new rulers (the mujahidin) in order to avoid repression and complete marginalisation.

²⁵ Weber's approach was of course more sophisticated than that of some of his epigones.

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