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How It All Began

A Short Look at the Pre-1979 Origins of Afghanistan's Conflicts

1 INTRODUCTION¹

For most people, it was the Soviet invasion over Christmas 1979 that put Afghanistan on the political map again after many decades. Before that, the last time Afghanistan affected policy in Western countries was in 1919 when its then reformer-king Amanullah started a short war against the British troops in what today is Pakistan (at that time British India) to regain his country's full independence. Europe was just out of the First World War and Amanullah took advantage of Britain's situation: it had little attention and fewer resources to spend at the margins of its empire.

Then, in the very last days of the 1970s, the Soviet leadership made the central Asian country the arena of the hottest conflict in the last part of the Cold War. As had been the case in Vietnam, one of the superpowers involved its own troops in an armed conflict in the so-called Third World where East and West were vying for dominance. The US saw a chance to pay back the USSR for its support to the Vietnamese liberation movement that had significantly contributed to the American defeat in

Indochina. Now, in Afghanistan, there was the chance to turn the tables against the 'evil empire' and make it bleed.² The invasion soon backfired for the Soviet Union, and its repercussions are reverberating up to this very day.

The emergence of an internationalised Afghanistan conflict, currently in its 33rd year, has been explained mainly through this Cold War perspective. One important dimension of the conflict, however, has often been ignored: the domestic factors that had undermined Afghanistan's internal stability of 40 years. This undermining began after King Nader's assassination and succession by his son Muhammad Zaher in 1933 and ended in Sardar (Prince) Muhammad Daud's coup d'état on 17 July 1973, which toppled the Afghan monarchy after 226 years. Daud's coup set an example, leading to a succession of violent power changes which, in turn, drew the Soviet Union into the conflict and triggered its military intervention six years later. Both the 1973 coup and the 1979 Soviet invasion were preceded by a chain of lesser-noticed domestic developments that, combined, led to the

¹ This is an updated and extended version of an article originally written for the journal *Papeles de relaciones ecosociales y cambio global*, Barcelona (<http://www.fuhem.es/revistapapeles/>) that will be published in January 2013. I am grateful to Doris Buddenberg, Lutz Rzehak, Martine van Bijlert and Marvin Weinbaum who reviewed this version and contributed valuable comment and detail.

² US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, in a 1997 interview with CNN, said he went to Pakistan immediately after the Soviet invasion to bring about a 'joint response', with the aim 'to make the Soviets bleed for as much and as long as is possible'. See <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-17/brzezinski2.html>.

build-up of political tension and destabilised the pre-1973 Afghan monarchy.

The first domestic factor to undermine stability was the largely unnoticed but profound change in Afghanistan's social fabric caused by a rapid growth of the educated class, an ongoing result of Amanullah's reforms in the 1920s, in a country with a growing and increasingly younger population. Inadequately absorbed by the stagnating state bureaucracy, which was dominated until 1964 by the extended royal clan, the educated youth turned into a recruitment pool for political activism.

The second factor was the political dynamic following the passing of a new constitution in 1964, which changed the country from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy – a top-down initiative of the king. Expectations raised by the new legal possibilities were not matched by the monarchy, which refused to accept political pluralism and legalised political parties. The extremes of the political spectrum, radical Leftists and Islamists, went underground and started to infiltrate the army.

Finally, an environmental crisis – the drought of 1969–72 – and the inadequate response of the government undermined the legitimacy of the monarchy, an atmosphere in which Sardar Daud – himself a member of the royal family and a former prime minister (1953–63) – could carry out his coup without serious resistance.

Daud's republic (1973–78) turned out to be short-lived, a five-year interim only. President Daud's alliance with the leftist Parcham faction enraged the conservative Islamic establishment, which had already turned against the king for his military and economic cooperation with the USSR (which, in turn, was a reaction after the US spurned neutral Afghanistan in favour of more pro-Western Pakistan). When radical Islamists failed to topple Daud in 1975 and retreated to Pakistan, Afghanistan's eastern neighbour welcomed the fighters with open arms and started to train them more systematically, in an attempt to pay back Afghanistan for supporting the irredentist Pashtun and Baluch guerrilla movements on its own territory.

Daud's regime in turn fell victim to another military coup, by the left-leaning People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), comprised of the reunited Parcham and Khalq factions, on 27 April 1978. The takeover of power by the PDPA, although not

encouraged or plotted by the Soviet leadership,³ was welcomed by it, and Afghanistan – with the 'socialist orientation' of its new leadership – became a part of what was called in the East as the growing 'socialist world system'.⁴

The US government started to clandestinely support the armed resistance of the Islamist mujahedin operating from Pakistan in July 1979, almost six months before the Soviet invasion, although not on a large scale yet.⁵ In December of the same year, the Soviet leadership decided to send troops to the rescue of the PDPA regime in Kabul, although with different objective than expected – they replaced the ruling faction with a rival one, Parcham, led by Babrak Karmal. The Soviets justified their move by earlier calls of President Nur Muhammad Taraki who was killed later (in September 1979) at the order of then Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin who took over Taraki's position. Afghanistan's low-profile domestic conflict had become the international conflict of the 1980s.⁶

³ According to a new study, the Soviet government encouraged the PDPA to stay allied with Daud after 1973. See: Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979–89*, London, Profile Books 2011, 31.

⁴ According to Marxist-Leninist theory, the socialist world system consisted of three elements: the countries in which socialism had already been victorious, the 'communist and workers movement' in the capitalist countries and the national liberation movements in the developing world. Among the latter, countries with a 'socialist orientation', like Angola, Laos or post-1978 Afghanistan, were seen as its progressive avant-garde.

⁵ President Jimmy Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the new regime in Kabul on 3 July 1979. See: Interview with the chairman of US National Security Council during the 1979 events, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 15–21 January 1998; an English translation ('How Jimmy Carter and I Started the Mujahideen') can be found here: <http://www.counterpunch.org/1998/01/15/how-jimmy-carter-and-i-started-the-mujahideen/>.

⁶ The best analyses of the Soviet decision-making process before the 1979 intervention are probably: Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal*, Oxford University Press 1995; Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A history of struggle and survival*, London, Tauris 2004; and Braithwaite, *Afgantsy* [see FN 3]. A transcript of one of Taraki's phone calls in which he asked for Soviet troops to be sent against the mujahedin insurgency (with Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin on 18 March 1979) can be found in: Wladimir Bukowski, *Abrechnung mit Moskau: Das sowjetische Unrechtsregime und die Schuld des Westens*, Gustav Lübbe Verlag, Bergisch Gladbach 1996, 344. As a result of Amin's role in Taraki's killing, Soviet-Afghan relations had deteriorated; then Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev

This paper wants to refresh necessary historical memory by describing the domestic developments that preceded support of Pakistan, then led by military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq (ruling from 1977–88), for the Afghan mujahedin immediately after the PDPA took power in April 1978, the US interference and the Soviet invasion, that in turn led to the internationalisation of existing conflicts, exacerbating them and lifting them to new levels of violence.

2 MODERNISATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

For much of its history Afghanistan remained largely a poor, though mostly self-sufficient agrarian country, ruled by centralising monarchs who struggled to keep colonisation at bay by isolating the country from the outside world. King Abdul Rahman (ruling from 1880–1901) for instance was famous for his resistance to extending railways connections from British India or Russia into Afghan territory. In the late nineteenth century, he had to accept the loss to Great Britain of territory – what are today Pakistan’s provinces of Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa – as well as of control over Afghanistan’s relations to the outside world, based on the Treaty of Gandamak.⁷ To the immense pride of Afghans, though, the country never became a full colony.

From the early twentieth century onwards, Afghanistan experienced an accelerated, top-down modernisation drive. Inspired by the reforms of Atatürk in Turkey and Reza Shah in Iran, and impressed by the rise of Japan, the first Asian country to defeat a European power (Russia in 1905), reformer-king Amanullah (ruling from 1919–29) started to modernise the army, government administration, economy and the media and to try to change social behaviour. Amanullah was supported by a small group of constitutionalist intellectuals and built on some reform experience

considered Taraki a personal friend and was shocked by his death. This is according to the memoirs of Hassan Sharq, quoted in M. Hassan Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979–1982*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1995, 39.

⁷ This treaty had already been signed by his predecessor Amir Muhammad Yaqub Khan (ruled February 1879–July 1880). Abdur Rahman had to accept it when enthroned by the British after their invasion in the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–80).

from the mid- and late-nineteenth century.⁸ He employed foreign military advisors, established a capacity for domestic weapons manufacturing, imposed European attire on government employees, encouraged women to drop the veil (with the Queen of Britain as an example), promoted the education of (some) girls and established a rudimentary parliamentary system.⁹ But his efforts met stiff resistance. In 1929, Amanullah was toppled by a revolt of Pashtun tribes led by the clergy, upset by the king’s secularising measures (and a tightening of the taxation system), and supported and financed by the British who wanted to pay back for Amanullah’s unilateral declaration of full independence in 1919.

Although Amanullah’s reforms are regularly described as a failure,¹⁰ they had strong positive long-term effects and were never fully reversed. Foremost, the education sector continued to expand. According to Afghan author A.B. Zuri, Amanullah’s education policies were ‘continued almost unchanged by the successor regimes up to the late 1970s’.¹¹

⁸ Kings Dost Muhammad (1826–38, 1842–63) and Sher Ali (1869–79) had started with a series of reforms, mainly of the military, the administration, taxation and, to an extent, education. Under Sher Ali, Afghanistan’s first newspaper appeared, *Shams-un-Nahar* (1875–79). King Abdul Rahman (1880–1901) attempted to weaken the Islamic clergy by controlling their base of income, the *waaf*. See Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reforms and Modernization, 1880–1946*, Stanford University Press, 1969, 75–77, 81, 87–88, 135.

⁹ For comprehensive descriptions of Amanullah’s reforms, the Afghan constitutionalists and their mastermind Mahmud Tarzi, see Gregorian, *The Emergence* [see FN 8]; Leon B. Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919–1929: King Amanullah’s Failure to Modernize a Tribal Society*, Cornell University Press 1973. On the Afghan constitutionalists, their influence on successive political movements and the history of Afghanistan’s political parties, see also: Thomas Ruttig, ‘Islamists, Leftists – and a Void in the Center. Afghanistan’s Political Parties and where they come from (1902–2006)’, *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*, Kabul 2006, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_9674-1522-2-30.pdf; and Thomas Ruttig, ‘Afghanistan’s Early Reformists: Mahmud Tarzi’s ideas and their influence on the Wesh Zalmian movement’, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, Occasional Paper, April 2011, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1646>.

¹⁰ Including by Gregorian, *The Emergence* [see FN 8] and Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion* [see FN 9].

¹¹ A.B. Zuri, ‘Das Erziehungswesen’, in *Afghanistan Ländermonographie*, ed by Paul Bucherer-Dietschi and Christoph Jentsch, *Schriftenreihe der Stiftung Bibliotheca*

Under Amanullah, a government-run educational system was established countrywide for the first time, with elementary, secondary and high schools (lycee). The 1923 *nezam-name* (a quasi-constitution) stipulated that 'elementary education is compulsory for all citizens of Afghanistan' (Art. 68); that 'every subject of Afghanistan has the right to an education at no cost' (Art. 14); and that 'all schools in Afghanistan are under the control, supervision and inspection of the government' (Art. 15). The last-mentioned provision took the education sector out of the hands of the Islamic clergy that until then effectively had a monopoly over it, except for the royal court and some well-off individuals who could afford to give their children a private education at home.

During the reformer-king Amanullah's reign, government spending for education rose by 1,000 per cent. Obligatory elementary education was enshrined in the 1923 constitutional law. The new Ministry for Education planned to establish at least one primary school in each district and one secondary school in each province; in 1928, some 40,000 pupils were enrolled in these schools all over the country. (This would be 100 pupils on average per district, in today's administrative boundaries.) In Kabul, three more elite schools were established, teaching German, French and English, in addition to the Habibia school (founded in 1903), previously the only institution of higher learning in the country, which employed mainly Indian teachers. Altogether, they had at least 500 pupils. Adult classes – for literacy but also on civic and religious subjects – were held. The king himself occasionally taught.¹²

A system for teachers' training was established, too, that by 1959 had produced some 2,500 teachers. This secularly educated group took over from the mullas who so far had dominated the schools' teaching staff. University-grade students were sent abroad, mainly to Turkey and Europe. In the field of vocational training, an agricultural school, a school for governors and one for clerks and accountants were opened.

While even schooling for boys remained limited – in some provincial centres the first boys' schools were only established in 1940 – girls' education was even more limited, even on the elementary level. By 1928, only 800 girls attended school in the whole country (1954: 8,625). There was only one

secondary school for girls, established in 1924 with help from France; in 1928, the first lyceum for girls followed.

Education suffered the strongest backlash from Amanullah's overthrow by Habibullah II (derogatorily called *Bacha-ye Saqao*, 'son of the water carrier') in 1929, particularly for girls. A Turkish school, more vocational schools, a medical school and a home economics school for women as well as coeducation for six- to eleven-year olds fell victim. The first 28 girls sent to Turkey in 1928 for higher education were recalled.

After this short, nine-month interlude in 1929 (Habibullah II was overthrown by General Nader Khan who was then proclaimed king), the education system was revived, even for girls. 'A first cautious step' was taken in 1932 when a girls' school was established 'disguised as a training course for nurses'.¹³ But primary education remained obligatory under Amanullah's successors. A medical school was established in 1932; five technical schools, a commercial and an artisan school as well as the Afghan Institute for Technology followed between 1937 and around 1960. Afghanistan's first university was opened in Kabul in 1946; the second in 1963, Nangrahar University in Jalalabad. In 1950, there were 10,100 pupils and students in Afghanistan, rising to 193,574 (1960) and then 664,574 (1970). Nevertheless, by 1967 primary school enrolment had reached only 17 per cent. In the Afghan year 1335 (1956/57), there were no village schools and only 20 primary schools for girls countrywide.¹⁴

The education system not only attracted the urban classes but also rural people, particularly from the Pashtun tribes who – as representatives of the ethnic group from which the monarchy sprang – were able and also interested in sending their sons

¹³ Zuri, 'Das Erziehungswesen', [see FN 11], 459; Eberhard Rhein and A. Ghanie Ghaussy, *Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung Afghanistans 1880–1965*, Schriften des Deutschen Orient-Instituts: Monographien, C.W. Leske Verlag, Opladen 1966, 172.

¹⁴ There are different sets of data. For example, Rubin has 96,793 (1950), 235,596 (1961) and 664,591 (1970), based on UNESCO figures and Afghan yearbooks. Rhein and Ghaussy have 308,200 school attendants (1963/64) and 2,043 students at the two universities (1962/63). Jensch's and Rhein/Ghaussy's figures are based on surveys by German experts who then worked in the country. Zuri, 'Das Erziehungswesen' [see FN 11], 455–73; Werner Jensch, *Die afghanischen Entwicklungspläne vom ersten bis zum dritten Plan*, *Afghanische Studien*, Vol 8, Verlag Anton Hain, Meisenheim am Glan 1973, 53, 206; Rhein and Ghaussy, *Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung* [see FN 13], 172–73, 179; Rubin, *Fragmentation* [see FN 12], 71.

Afghanica, Vol 4, Liestal 1986, 457. This and all following quotes from German sources are my translation.

¹² Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1995, 310; Gregorian, *The Emergence* [see FN 8], 240–2, 355–57; Zuri, 'Das Erziehungswesen' [see FN 11], 459.

to the new schools, not least because jobs in government beckoned. The fact that students maintained close links with their tribes or communities¹⁵ even after they entered the state bureaucracy and settled down in Kabul or other cities had important repercussions on the rural areas – not least that education (as long as it was not coeducational) was generally *not* seen as alien or negative. On the contrary, sending sons to university helped diversify useful relationships and constituted an additional coping mechanism. This way, modern thoughts slowly penetrated traditional society, including among the Pashtun tribes, and the educated class grew considerably.

While the new education system drastically increased reach and output, it also exacerbated social and political tensions and triggered change, particularly in post-World War II Afghanistan. The downside of its success, and the source of significant tension, was that the output was not matched by increased opportunities for the educated young in government services, despite the formulation of the three post-WWII development plans, starting in 1957, that aimed at more rapidly modernising the country's economy.¹⁶

Before the crisis in 1973, the state remained almost the only employer for university and high school graduates. However, access to positions in the state administration was blocked by a rather inflexible class of bureaucrats who jealously defended their positions, while members of the large royal clan and the tribal aristocracy, mainly from the Durrani tribes, blocked access to the higher echelons of government before 1964. Exclusion of the significant Shia minority from higher positions slowly exacerbated ethnic tensions with the Pashtun tribal aristocracy.¹⁷

¹⁵ Knabe-Wohlfahrt observed while in Afghanistan in the early 1970s that 'school and university students carry to the places of their origin during their holidays what they saw and learnt in Kabul and also spread what is discussed and criticised in their circles. This way, the government unintentionally and regularly distributes carriers of new ideas and opinions over the country who transport ideas about possible other ways of life into a still relatively static rural society'. Erika Knabe-Wohlfarth, 'Gegenwärtige Tendenzen sozialen Wandels', in *Afghanistan: Natur, Geschichte und Kultur, Staat, Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft*, ed by Willy Kraus, Horst Erdmann Verlag, Tübingen and Basel 1972, 258–59.

¹⁶ This is briefly described in: Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion* [see FN 6], 8; the best account can be found in: Jensch, *Die afghanischen Entwicklungspläne* [see FN 14].

¹⁷ Hazaras, the largest ethnic groups among the Afghan Shiites, were only accepted for officer positions in the

Young members of ethnic minorities were thus over-proportionally represented in the newly emerging political groups. The students were also complaining about increasing corruption.¹⁸

The slowly emerging modern sectors in the Afghan economy linked with industrialisation, including the minor private sector,¹⁹ were not able to offer the needed numbers of jobs. At the end of the 1930s, 2–3,000 people worked in industrial enterprises run by private joint stock companies (*shirkets*), mainly as conscripts and seasonal labourers. By 1954 this number had risen to 6,000. At the end of 1972, the industry, mining and energy sectors combined contributed only 17 per cent of the country's gross domestic product and less than 5 per cent of employment.²⁰

armed forces and for higher positions in the state administration under the PDPA regime. See also: Niamatullah Ibrahim, 'The Failure of a Clerical Proto-State, Hazarajat 1979–1984', *Crisis States Research Center*, Working Paper no 6, London School of Economics 2006; and Niamatullah Ibrahim, 'Ideology without Leadership: The rise and decline of Maoism in Afghanistan', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, Thematic Report 03/2012, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2963>.

¹⁸ Knabe-Wohlfarth, 'Gegenwärtige Tendenzen' [see FN 15], 258–59.

¹⁹ The first private joint stock companies (*shirket*) were established during Amanullah's reign; one of the first ones founded in Herat was called 'Islah' (Reform). N[ikolai] Gurevič, *Očerk istorii torgovogo kapitala v Afghanistane*, Moscow 1967, 26–27. The shirkets' capital was often mixed, with both individuals (including members of the royal family) and the state as shareholders. Peter Oesterdiekhoff, *Hemmnisse und Widersprüche in der Entwicklung armer Länder – Darstellung am Beispiel Afghanistans*, Munich 1978, 15–16.

²⁰ N.I. Chernyakhovskaya, 'Formirovanie promyshlennovo proletariata Afganistana', in: *Formirovanie rabochevo klassa stran Azii i Afriki, sbornik statej*, Akademia nauk SSSR, Moscow 1971, 17. In 1972, there were only 152 industrial enterprises with altogether 37,500 employees, more than half of which had less than 100 employees (only 21 had 2–3,000 employees in 1955; in 1945 there were only 'around 10' of that size; 1955: 21). This was around 1 per cent of the country's employed population. Two thirds of these enterprises were based in Kabul. Moreover, most of the workers were only temporarily employed. They mainly came from the agricultural sector (and returned there after a while) or – in particular in the earlier decades – were army conscripts. See: Horst Büscher, *Die Industriearbeiter Afghanistans, Afghanische Studien*, Vol 1, Verlag Anton Hain, Meisenheim am Glan 1969, 114–16; Horst Büscher, 'Bergbau, Industrie und Energiewirtschaft', in: Kraus (ed), *Afghanistan* [see FN

Dissatisfied with the slow pace of progress and confronted with social problems, the newly educated class – often called the *roshanfikran*²¹ in Afghanistan – became the breeding ground for the re-emergence of a reformist political current in the late 1940s and early 1950s, called the Wesh Zalmian.²² This movement adopted ideas of the first constitutional movement (*mashrutiat*) and the Young Afghans who had inspired and pushed forward Amanullah's reforms at the start of the century.²³ Lack of employment created fertile ground – and spare time – for political activity.

This first and short post-WWII reformist and pro-democratic flicker was quickly suppressed although it did not question the monarchy as such, concentrated on its work in parliament and the new but small independent print media, tried to petition the king to enforce reforms top-down and – apart from a few exceptions – failed to link up with broader parts of the population.

Within the new political movement, the Students Union of Kabul University that was founded on 4 April 1950 had the most notable impact on the Afghan public. The Union's establishment initially had the agreement of the government, which wanted to channel the students' increasingly critical mood. The government provided it with an office and the De Pohene Nandara theatre as a venue for its weekly meetings. But soon sympathisers of the Wesh Zalmian movement turned the Union into an opposition movement that called itself 'democratic' and wanted to demonstrate this fact by abstaining from electing a chairman. According to eyewitnesses the union's meetings attracted large crowds of 'hundreds of people', university and high school students, but also 'lower class' Kabul citizens. Opposition parliamentarians attended and reported about their work. In April and May 1950, a delegation of the union toured the south of the country (including Kandahar, Ghazni, Qalat and Gereshk), visited factories, power stations and building projects and met local students and tribal leaders. In Kandahar, it staged an educational play, 'Wahdat-e Melli' (National Unity), which turned out so successful that it was repeated in Kabul – and led to the first arrests among the union's

15], 328–43; Horst Büscher, 'Der industrielle Sektor', in *Afghanistan Ländermonographie* [see FN 11], 387–98.

²¹ Dari for 'enlightened thinkers'.

²² For more detail see: Ruttig, *Afghanistan's Early Reformists* [see FN 9].

²³ The main aims of the *mashrutiyat* and the Young Afghans were regaining full independence and changing Afghanistan into a constitutional monarchy. In 1919, only the first aim was achieved.

participants. After a leading member refused to open one of its meetings 'in the name of the King', the union was disbanded in November 1950. Its re-legalisation became a core demand of the opposition movement.²⁴

Another sign of growing political activism was first industrial action of Afghan workers, in 1949. According to the Soviet author Korgun,²⁵ one of the few non-Afghan sources about this period's opposition movement, strikes of textile and coal mine workers as well as of employees of trade shirkats in Kandahar and Qataghan provinces were 'a direct result of the propagation of oppositional ideas'. Opposition leaders like Dr Abdul Rahman Mahmudi seem to have encouraged the strikers. The textile workers' strike in the town of Jabal-us-Seraj in 1949 for pay rises and better supplies for workers and their families lasted four days and ended without success; the government was apparently able to utilise 'disunity' among the protesters. Striking coal miners who, according to contemporary Afghan newspapers, wanted to establish an 'association to protect their interests' in 1950 were sacked, as were striking shirkat employees in 1950. Another strike of textile workers in Pul-e Khumri in 1951 was answered with pay cuts and the instruction 'not to get involved in political affairs'.²⁶

When toward the end of the same year sectors of the opposition movement announced the formation of political parties – the Wesh Zalmian party and the Fatherland Party (Hezb-e Watan) – and in 1951 the People's Party (Hezb-e Khalq), the authorities cracked down. The opposition's leading activists lost their positions in the administration (which some had) and were either exiled or imprisoned. Those who were closer to the monarchy (often but not exclusively Pashtuns) were treated much better than those from ethnic or religious minorities.²⁷

²⁴ More detailed in: Thomas Ruttig, *Zur Bedeutung der bürgerlichen Oppositionsbewegung der 50er Jahre unseres Jahrhunderts für die Formierung progressiver politischer Kräfte in Afghanistan*, diploma thesis, Humboldt-Universität, Berlin 1985, 81–86.

²⁵ Viktor Korgun, *Intelligentsia v političeskoj žizni Afganistana*, Moscow 1983, 89; the Afghan printed media of this period have not fully been explored and are extremely rare to find. I only possess some copies.

²⁶ Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar, 'Manteq-e ma'kus', *Watan* (daily, Kabul), 15 Aqrab 1330 [5 November 1951].

²⁷ One of the leaders, Dr Abdul Rahman Mahmudi from Kabul, had to spend ten years in prison and was only released after he had picked up tuberculosis that killed him after a few months in liberty.

Significantly, university and high school students and graduates were among the political party and media activists in this first post-WWII democratic phase, as they would be in the ‘decade of democracy’ heralded by the 1964 constitution.

3 HALF-HEARTED POLITICAL OPENING

In 1963, King Muhammad Zahir Shah started a top-down constitutional-democratic opening. In March that year, the king – in Louis Dupree’s words²⁸ – ‘after 30 years of almost figurehead status’ dismissed his first cousin, the authoritarian Prime Minister Daud, after ten years in office and ‘took steps which made him king in more than name’. Until then, the five so-called Musaheban brothers wielded the real power through Daud, their nephew.²⁹ The king commissioned a constitution that came into force in 1964, abolishing what at least on paper was an absolute monarchy, and introduced an almost full-scale parliamentary system. Significantly, for the first time no member of the royal family was head of government; the royal family was in fact barred from taking over government positions by the new constitution. This was read by many, including himself, as a ‘Lex Daud’, an act to prevent Daud from ever returning to this post, and is considered a key motive of the latter’s 1973 coup d’état.

While the constitution actually contained the right of association, including to form political parties, the implementation of that right was conditional on a pending law on political parties coming into force. This law had already passed parliament and awaited the king’s signature. Meanwhile, a second wave of parties³⁰ had emerged, this time much

more diverse than 15 years earlier in the Wesh Zalmian period. It included royalists, liberal and social democrats, Pashtun and non-Pashtun ethno-nationalists as well as Marxists, both pro-Moscow and pro-Beijing, and Islamists. The king then chose not to sign the law, fearing that extremist groups might get the upper hand in parliament.³¹

The democratic opening, almost paradoxically, led to a further destabilisation of the country and to a radicalisation and diversification of the opposition. This was mainly because this top-down move was far from being consistent; it rather faltered over its inherent contradictions.

Beginning in 1964, Afghanistan’s students attended the parliamentary debates and carried out a series of mass protests. A student demonstration on 3 Aqrab (25 October) 1965 turned violent when the police opened fire and killed and wounded several participants. In 1968, when students revolted from Paris to Prague, the Kabul students followed again and Kabul University was closed for the entire year.³²

political system, including secret balloting for the first time in the 1949 parliamentary elections which promptly returned a reformist faction, the National Front (Jabhaye Melli), with five members and 30–40 sympathisers. Groups of intellectuals around some of these MPs and others had started independent print media, but when they took the next step and publicly proclaimed the establishment of political parties in late 1950 and early 1951, the government cracked down. The groups and their press were quickly suppressed. The Students’ Union of Kabul University, however, remained legal longer and continued to cooperate with those political groups that did not disperse but went underground. See: Ruttig, *Afghanistan’s Early Reformists* [see FN 5], 6–7.

³¹ Prime Minister Dr Abdul Zahir had tried to push the king to sign by going public in support of the law in spring 1972 again, but failed. See ‘Memorandum From Robert A. Flaten of the Office of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh Affairs to the Director of the Office of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh Affairs (Laingen), Washington, 31 May 1972’, in: *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Vol E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972, Doc 362*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d362>.

³² The 3 Aqrab became a cause celebre and a memorial plaque was installed at the south-western corner of Deh Mazang roundabout under President Babrak Karmal (1979–86) who had been one of the leaders of the Students’ Union in the 1950s, briefly jailed then, and one of the few leftist members of parliament in 1960s. It was visible until recently and is now covered by a gigantic advertisement board. See: Zuri, ‘Das Erziehungswesen’ [see FN 11], 462, and also: Andreas Kramer, ‘Kabuler Frühling: Der Aufbruch der afghanischen Studenten- und

²⁸ Louis Dupree, ‘An Informal Talk with King Mohammad Zahir of Afghanistan’, *American University Field Staff Reports*, South Asia Series, Vol. VII, no 9 (Afghanistan), July 1963.

²⁹ The Musaheban brothers or ‘companions’ of late Amir Habibullah (1901–19) were rivals of Habibullah’s son and successor, Amanullah. Due to the unclear circumstances of Habibullah’s assassination and Amanullah’s usurpation of the throne – he was not the oldest son – they saw him as illegitimate. They were Muhammad Nader (King 1929–33), Muhammad Hashem (Prime Minister 1929–46), Shah Mahmud (Prime Minister 1946–53), Marshal Shah Wali (commander of the Central Army Corps in Kabul) and Muhammad Aziz, Daud’s father who had been assassinated in 1933 by a supporter of Amanullah while serving as an Ambassador in Berlin.

³⁰ A first wave had emerged when Shah Mahmud was Prime Minister (1946–53) and somewhat liberalised the

This 'royal indecision and caution' proved to be, as Amin Saikal called it, a 'fatal mistake'.³³ While the moderates obeyed, either dissolving their groups or decreasing their activity, the leftists and the Islamists went underground and started to infiltrate the armed forces, viewing a coup d'état as the only possible way to power now, foreshadowing the much more violent conflicts of the 1980s. Despite some political opening, the party-less constitutional monarchy proved too inflexible to accommodate and absorb conflicting political agendas.³⁴ A similar dynamic has, incidentally, emerged under the post-2001 Karzai government, with legislature that – for the first time (apart from Najibullah's post-1987 experiment of 'controlled pluralism') – gave an official role to political parties, which was however in practice limited by the President's well-known antipathy to political parties. This led to a delay in putting the political parties' law into force in time for the first presidential election in 2004, so that political parties were unable to field candidates and had too little time to prepare for the first parliamentary elections in 2005. Political party lists of candidates are still not provided for in the currently valid election law.³⁵

Simmering inner-monarchic conflicts led Sardar Muhammad Daud into an alliance with the more 'aristocratic' faction of the PDPA, Parcham.³⁶ This alliance succeeded in toppling the monarchy in 1973 by a military coup d'état, the first violent regime change since Amanullah was overthrown in 1929. The Daud-Parcham alliance edged out the Islamists who also tried to take over power, but fell

Schülerbewegung ab 1965', *INKOTA-Brief* 105 (Sept 1998), Berlin, 40–42.

³³ Also laws about provincial councils, the right to demonstrate and an independent judiciary were not signed. 'King Zahir's Experiment: Some End-of-Tour Observations,' US Embassy Kabul to Department of State, Airgram A-90, 1 August 1970, in *The September 11th Sourcebooks*, Vol. IV, *The Once and Future King?*, From the Secret Files on King Zahir's Reign in Afghanistan, 1970–1973, ed by William Burr, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book no 59; Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan* [see FN 6], 55.

³⁴ For a detailed study about these events, see my paper: Ruttig, 'Islamists, Leftists' [see FN 9].

³⁵ More about political party development in Afghanistan and specifically the parties' role, and marginalisation, in post-2001 Afghanistan in: Ruttig, 'Islamists, Leftists' [see FN 9]; Thomas Ruttig, 'Afghanistan's Democrats: From underground into marginalisation', in *Afghanistan 1979–2009: In the Grip of Conflict*, e-book, Middle East Institute, Washington 2009.

³⁶ Because of this alliance, Parcham was derided as the 'royal communist party' by its 'comrades' in the Khalq faction.

out internally in the course of events. By 1977, Daud had come out as the winner, side-lining and persecuting the Parchamis. This strained relations with the Soviet Union, while a rapprochement with Reza Shah's Iran caused concerns in Moscow about a possible west-turn by Daud.

In this context, one could argue that Afghanistan's state crisis started in 1973, not to 1978 (the 'Saur revolution') or 1979 (the Soviet invasion). Daud and Parcham created the first regime change by force in 40 years and set a precedent for events to come. This soon spiralled out of control.

4 US REJECTION OF AFGHANISTAN

After World War II, during which Afghanistan had remained neutral, it rejected pressure from the United States to join the anti-communist Baghdad Pact (later CENTO) founded in 1955. The US government had made this a precondition for military aid after Afghanistan approached Washington twice for military aid. The first time, in 1950–51, the US replied that Afghanistan would have to pay for the aid – which had not been Kabul's intention – and, moreover, that 'transit through Pakistan will have to be arranged with no help from the United States . . . [t]he sale will have to be made public, and it would help if the Pashtunistan claim is dropped.' This was treated as 'a political refusal' by the Afghan government. In 1954, new Prime Minister Sardar Muhammad Daud (1953–63) received an open rejection on his renewed request. Secretary of State Alan Dulles' explanation that 'extending military aid to Afghanistan would create problems not offset by the strength it would create'³⁷ was a clear hint that in the contentious Afghan-Pakistani tensions over the Pashtunistan issue, which had increased under Daud, the US preferred its relationship with Pakistan.

In 1955, Afghanistan participated in the Bandung process and became a co-founder of the Non-Aligned Movement, along with Nehru's India, Sukarno's Indonesia and Tito's Yugoslavia. In the

³⁷ Walid Majid, 'Prime minister Daoud's relationship with Washington (1953–1963)', *Institute for Afghan Studies*, http://www.institute-for-afghan-studies.org/Foreign%20Affairs/us-afghan/daoud_us_0.htm (retrieved in 2001, link dead now; soft copy with the author).

mid-1950s, Kabul also started military cooperation with the Soviet Union.³⁸

Nevertheless, Afghanistan continued to pursue its traditional neutral line and tried to establish itself in equidistance from the two major blocks. It used the global East-West competition to mobilise developmental aid. This became apparent most strikingly in Afghanistan's successful attempt to draw major donors into a peaceful competition, resulting in nationally implemented provincial development programmes: by the Soviet Union in Nangrahar province, the US in Helmand and Germany in Paktia.

As a result of Afghan-Soviet military cooperation, an increasing number of Afghan officers were trained in the Soviet Union. Some of them adopted communist, or at least nationalist, anti-Western ideas and started recruiting followers in the Afghan armed forces. A clandestine leftist officers' organisation was established in the Afghan army in the 1970s, led by Mir Akbar Khaibar.³⁹ It was involved in preparing the 28 April 1978 'Saur (April) Revolution', a military coup that first established a Military Command Council that, after less than a week, handed over power to a PDPA-led civilian government, a unique development for military coups in Third World countries.

Increasing Afghan-Soviet relations and the activities of left-leaning political forces led to a crisis between the Afghan monarchy and the Islamic clergy, which traditionally had bestowed

³⁸ This was approved by a Loya Jirga in 1955. Afghan-Soviet cooperation, however, had already started during the Third Anglo-Afghan (or Afghan Independence) War in 1919 when both newly emerged countries recognized each other diplomatically and the Soviet Union sent military help, as it did during tribal uprisings against King Amanullah. Relations were not without tensions, however, because of the Afghan king's rejection of the Soviet annexation of Bukhara and Khiwa (and its support for the anti-Soviet 'Basmachi' insurgency against them) and as a result of border conflicts originating in Czarist Russia's annexation of Turkmen territories hitherto dominated by Kabul.

³⁹ Born in 1925, Khaibar was an instructor at the Kabul Police Academy when he was first arrested for political reasons in 1950. In 1964, he played a role in founding the Revolutionary Army Association, with 60 officer members, that later joined the Parcham faction of the PDPA. See: Joachim Ludwig, *Einige Probleme der Strategie und Politik der Demokratischen Volkspartei Afghanistans (DVPA) in der nationaldemokratischen Revolution in Afghanistan (1978 bis 1985)*, dissertation, Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim ZK der SED, Berlin 1986, 32, 43, using 'internal information from the PDPA'. The coup itself was triggered, prematurely, by the Khaibar's killing on 17 April 1978 by unknown perpetrators.

religious legitimacy on the monarchy. Parts of the clergy started an Islamist opposition movement, violently opposed to both developments. In 1958–59 – when the second visit to Afghanistan of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was announced – a first clandestine Islamist opposition movement emerged, under the name of Jamiat-e Islami,⁴⁰ that organised mass protests. A second wave of Islamist protests followed when, in 1970, a leftist newspaper praised Lenin, on his one-hundredth birth anniversary, in terminology reserved in Islam for the Prophet Muhammad.⁴¹

From the beginning, Jamiat was led by Afghan graduates of Cairo's al-Azhar University – Afghanistan, like all other countries with Muslim populations, had a quota for students⁴² – who had been strongly influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and who became the predecessors of the 1980s mujahedin *tanzim*.⁴³ Both protest waves were crushed by mass arrests of Islamist activists ordered by the government which, in turn, further radicalised the Islamist movement.

5 TENSIONS WITH PAKISTAN

The Pashtunistan conflict has shaped bilateral Afghan-Pakistani relations since the moment Pakistan started to exist after the break-up of British India in 1947. Pakistan inherited the areas that had been split off from Afghanistan by Great Britain when it pushed forward the border of its crown colony British India to the northwest, toward Afghanistan. The November 1893 Durand Agreement drove a dividing line, the so-called Durand Line, right through the areas of Pashtun settlement.

When British India was divided in 1947, the Pashtun-inhabited areas on the eastern side of the Durand Line were – like the Princely States – given the choice between accession to India or to Pakistan. Their strong but pacifist nationalist

⁴⁰ Jamiat split up after the PDPA takeover in 1978 and the start of the jihad against the Soviets in 1979 into different organisations. One of them continued to use the name Jamiat-e Islami.

⁴¹ The *ulema* (religious scholars) even dropped the name of the king from their Friday sermons. See: Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion* [see FN 6], 55.

⁴² Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, Cambridge 1986, 69–70; Asta Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*, Richmond 1995, 231. There were also quotas for Afghans at the more Islamist centre of religious learning in Deoband in India.

⁴³ *Tanzim* is an Arabic loanword used in Dari and Pashto, used to describe the mujahedin 'parties' which are, in fact, political-military networks.

movement, the Khudai Khedmatgaran (God's Servants, also known as Red Shirts),⁴⁴ advocated for an independent Pashtunistan, however, and boycotted the referendum because that option was not included. The majority of the minority that participated in the referendum opted for Pakistan. As a result, the government in Kabul reacted with a 'No' vote, the only government to do so, when Pakistan applied for UN membership in September 1947, an affront not forgotten to this very day. In 1949, a Loya Jirga in Kabul proclaimed its support for the self-determination of Pashtunistan and declared the 1893 Durand Agreement null and void.

Afghanistan has since then never given up its claim to these areas, not under the king, or under Daud and the PDPA, or even under the Pakistani-supported Taliban. Daud in particular was known as a staunch supporter of the Pashtunistan cause.⁴⁵

Up to the last years of the PDPA regime, Afghanistan organised a number of symbolic events designed to publicly underline its claims, including celebrating the annual Pashtunistan Day and naming Pashtunistan Square in the centre of Kabul, over which the red-white-red flag of Pashtunistan flew. Afghanistan's Ministry for Tribal and Border Affairs was given the task of caring for Pakistan's Pashtuns, who were allowed to take Afghans passport and to study free of charge at Afghan universities. Kabul also supported Pashtun – and later Baloch – insurgencies in Pakistan, by sending irregular forces or weapons or providing refuge for exiles and bases for their leaders. Under Daud's premiership, Afghanistan even closed the border with Pakistan in support of Pashtun rights, a measure that backfired because Afghanistan, as a land-locked country, was much more dependent on Pakistan than vice versa.

When Daud, a staunch supporter of the Pashtunistan cause during his first prime ministership (1953–63), took over power again in 1973, Pakistan feared a revival of tensions. And when Daud and his PDPA allies cracked down on

⁴⁴ Its leader, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890–1988) was a close ally of Mahatma Gandhi and also known as the 'Frontier Gandhi'.

⁴⁵ The author repeatedly encountered speculation among Afghans (not only PDPA members) that PDPA leader and president Najibullah was murdered in 1996 by agents of the Pakistani intelligence after he had rejected to sign a back-dated treaty that would have recognised the Durand Line as the official border between both countries. It is difficult to judge the validity of these allegations but without doubt the unresolved Durand Line problem is seen as a major threat in Pakistan for this country's security.

Islamist groups that had launched an armed uprising on 22 July 1975 that failed, Pakistan received the fleeing survivors and offered training. Finally, Pakistan could hit Afghanistan with its own weapon.

According to Pakistani author Hassan Abbas, Major General Nasirullah Khan Babar (then President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's head of the paramilitary Frontier Corps in the then North West Frontier Province) 'played a central role in 1973 in organizing and grooming anti-Daud Afghan resistance forces', including military training 'by the Pakistani military's Special Services Group' to which they were recruited as a cover. In 1973, Bhutto, who also held the post of prime minister, created an 'Afghan cell' in the country's foreign ministry under his direct supervision 'in preparation for heightened activity on the Afghan frontier'.⁴⁶ According to another Pakistani author, Imtiaz Gul, 1,331 Afghan militants received a monthly payment through the Frontier Corps. According to a contemporary US source, altogether 5,000 Afghans received military training. About 150 of them were commanders, 'some 90 of whom survived to become important mujahedin leaders in the [anti-Soviet fight of the] 1980s'.⁴⁷

General Babar said in a 1989 interview with the *New York Times* that the US had contributed financial aid to Afghan Islamist leaders as early as 1973: 'the United States had also been financing ... potential [Afghan] leaders since 1973.' According to a former Pakistani diplomat working in Kabul at that time and later interviewed by Peter Tomsen, a former US ambassador to the Afghan mujahedin,

⁴⁶ Hassan Abbas, 'Transforming Pakistan's Frontier Corps', *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 5 Issue 6, March 2007, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=1056&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=182&no_cache=1; Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army and the Wars Within*, Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 368. Since 1971, Pakistan had been ruled by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, leader of the moderately left-leaning Pakistan People's Party as a civilian president and prime minister in personal union and with all-encompassing powers. Bhutto groomed a new generation of military officers that supported him, including General Babar. Nevertheless, the military establishment that had ruled the country for most of the time after independence in 1947 started to see him as a threat to their key decision-making role and finally overthrew him in a military coup in 1977.

⁴⁷ Imtiaz Gul, *The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan's Lawless Frontier*, Viking, New York 2000, 2; Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*, Oxford University Press 1999, 17–18.

Pakistan has paid mujahedin leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar 'in the early 1970s'.⁴⁸

After the Soviets invaded, these Islamist groups became the basis for the mujahedin movement. And the approach was repeated with the Taleban who are mainly Pashtun but, as Islamists, do not prioritise Pashtun irredentism.⁴⁹

6 ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

The legitimacy of the Afghan monarchist government was also undermined by a food crisis, triggered by a severe drought in the early 1970s,⁵⁰ and its inability to react. The drought led to crop failures, food shortages and food price hikes across the country as well as famine, mainly in the Hazarajat, i.e., parts of the provinces of Faryab, Badghis, Ghor, Herat, Uruzgan as well as, apparently to a lesser extent, Bamian and Ghazni and also Badakhshan.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Henry Kamm, 'Pakistani Officials Tell of Ordering Afghan Rebel Push', *New York Times*, 23 April 1989, quoted in: Vahid Brown and Don Rassler, *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973–2010*, Columbia/Hurst, London (to be published soon), 44; Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failure of Great Powers*, Public Affairs, New York 2011, 102.

⁴⁹ Despite all the support they received from Pakistan and like all other Afghan governments before them, however, they never accepted the Durand Line while in power.

⁵⁰ References to the first year of the drought differ. A 1986 handbook about Afghanistan speaks about 1970–71 only. Carl Rathjens, 'Das Klima', in *Afghanistan Ländermonographie* [see FN 11], 50. A UN document mentions the years of 1971–73. According to US Embassy documents cited later in this paper, it started in 1969. A contemporary newspaper article also speaks of 'three years of searing drought': 'Drought in Afghanistan Takes Toll', *New York Times*, 24 January 1972, <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F60617F83959107B93C6AB178AD85F468785F9>.
⁵¹ 'Telegram 4851 from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 7 August 1971, 1345Z', in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972, Doc 341, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d341>; 'Telegram 5348 from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 14 September 1972, 1200Z', in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972, Doc 365, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d365>; 'Telegram 6029 from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, October 16, 1972, 1100Z', in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–

Few contemporary sources mention this crisis, and data are even scarcer. Data presented at a hydrogeology conference in Kabul in 2005 show that in nine of the twelve years between 1966 and 1977, precipitation in the Kabul basin lay below the 1956 to 1983 average of 312 mm annually.⁵² Between 1970 and 1972, German ornithologists reported drought-related falling water levels in the melt-water-fed lakes of Ghazni in the drought-affected area, while studying flamingo colonies in those areas and comparing their observations with earlier field reports from the 1960s.⁵³

Almost every Afghan old enough recalls these events; most describe how people in the drought-stricken areas were 'forced to eat grass', after they had consumed the seed for the coming year. German magazine *Der Spiegel* reported in October 1971⁵⁴:

Thousands of Afghans leave their villages in the Southwest of the country. They move to Iran or West Pakistan. Afghans attack Afghans. They fight for food and access to water. The developing country at the Hindukush . . . suffers from an almost unprecedented drought. Since more than two years, there was near to no rain or snow. Wheat prices have grown threefold since 1968. Meat prices fell by half since grass and water for the 22 million sheep are insufficient. The herdsmen and farmers slaughter their animals or sell them at knockdown prices to their neighbours in Iran, the USSR or West Pakistan. . . . This year, already 60 to 70 per cent of the qaraqul hides meant for export have perished. And at least 70 per cent of sheep flocks will not

1972, Doc 370, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d370>.

⁵² G. Houben, N. Niard, T. Tünnermeier and Th. Himmelsbach, 'Hydrogeology of the Kabul Basin (Afghanistan), part I: aquifers and hydrology', *Hydrogeology Journal* (2009) 17, Reston, Va., 672; *Inventory of Ground-Water Resources in the Kabul Basin, Afghanistan*, US Department of the Interior, US Geological Survey, Scientific Investigations Report 2005–5090, Washington DC, 4.

⁵³ Rathjens, 'Das Klima' [see FN 49], 49; Gunther Nogge, 'Beobachtungen an den Flamingobrutplätzen Afghanistans', *Journal für Ornithologie*, no 115 (1974), 142–51. In those times, the climate change phenomenon had not entered the general discourse and there is, as far as I can see, no specific attention to this in the contemporary literature about Afghanistan.

⁵⁴ 'Afghanistan: Große Dürre', *Spiegel* 43/1971, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-44916472.html>; my translation.

*survive the winter unless foreign countries
urgently help the Afghans.*

Wheat production dropped by 20 per cent in the first year, as did output of other varieties of grain. Prices for wheat and wheat flour went up – depending on sort and quality – between 65 and 110 per cent in 1970. The overall cereal harvest for 1970 was under that of 1969 by 16 per cent (600,000–700,000 metric tons). A year later, the wheat shortage estimated by the Afghan government had increased to 538,000 tons.⁵⁵

In 1972, despite a bumper crop in most areas of Afghanistan, at least one third of the estimated population of 650,000 in a dozen districts throughout Ghor, in eastern Badghis, southern Faryab and northern Uruzgan was still living under ‘severe famine conditions . . . destitute and without food’ shortly before winter’s onset, because of ‘wholly inadequate’ resources to respond and a lack of information provided by local authorities. In a cable to Washington, the US Embassy in Kabul reported that ‘people and government officials are so accustomed to deprivation and death without hope of outside assistance that they tend [to] accept [the] crisis or deny that [a] crisis exists’.⁵⁶

The loss of animal flocks, particularly those of *qaraqul* sheep, resulted in a drop of foreign exchange earnings while, at the same time, the country was facing drastically increasing debt

⁵⁵ Richard F. Nyrop and Donald M. Seekins (eds), *Afghanistan Country Study*, Foreign Area Studies, The American University, January 1986, Chapter 3, <http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/index.html>; ‘Telegram 6242 from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 8 October 1970, 0810Z’, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972, Doc 336, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d336>; ‘Letter from the Afghan Minister of Planning (Sarabi) to the Ambassador to Afghanistan (Neumann), Kabul, 20 July 1970’, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972, Doc 335, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d335>; ‘Telegram 5641 from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 13 September 1971, 1305Z’, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972, Doc 347, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d347>.

⁵⁶ ‘Telegram 5348 from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 14 September 1972, 1200Z’, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972, Doc 365, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d365>.

service payments.⁵⁷ Casualty numbers among the population are vague, though. One source gives a range of 50,000 to 500,000 for the number of people who died.⁵⁸

Although the Afghan government had warned against the crisis early on and requested foreign aid from various governments starting from July 1970, its overall passive reaction in practice compounded the problems significantly. Eyewitnesses reported that foreign humanitarian aid, including wheat, was left to rot at Kabul airport by corrupt or inefficient officials. Already in 1970, the distribution of fertiliser – to boost the wheat yield – had been mishandled by the ‘corrupt system’ at the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation that ‘seemed aimed at holding up progress’, while the government failed to use the army for emergency relief.⁵⁹

According to US Embassy reports, donors criticised the Afghan government for having no coordinated ‘plan of action in establishing priorities, either as to provinces or supplies’; in fact, it lacked both a disaster management organisation and an ad-hoc cabinet-level coordinator. Finally in August 1972, the prime minister signed a decree that set up ‘a centralised emergency relief organisation’ that ‘had been pending cabinet approval for weeks’. According to the US Embassy, ‘most provincial officials including governors’ showed ‘extraordinarily poor leadership and analytical ability’, if not an ‘apathetic attitude’, not reporting conditions on the ground ‘systematically’ but often ‘ruthlessly exploiting the situation . . . for their personal advantage’. In fact, they were selling food aid in the markets. Journalists and foreigners were kept out of most affected areas, and the central

⁵⁷ Qaraqul hides were Afghanistan’s main export product (1970: USD 13 million out of 69 million total exports), next to dried fruit and medical plants. ‘Afghanistan: Große Dürre’ [see FN 53]. Debt payment requirements were up by 30 per cent in 1970 compared to the year before and probably exceeded 30 per cent of Afghanistan’s total export earnings. ‘Telegram 4311 from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 12 July 1971, 1020Z’, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972, Doc 338, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d338>.

⁵⁸ George Arney, *Afghanistan*, 1990, 66, quoted in: Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan* [see FN 6], 170.

⁵⁹ ‘Afghanistan: Große Dürre’ [see FN 53]; ‘Audience with King Zahir’, U.S. Embassy Kabul to Department of State, Cable 4745, 2 August 1971, 1, in *The September 11th Sourcebooks*, Vol. IV, The Once and Future King?, From the Secret Files on King Zahir’s Reign in Afghanistan, 1970–1973, ed by William Burr, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 59.

government was 'extremely reluctant to declare [an] emergency' in order to avoid being blamed for it. This type of non-reaction was further compounded by the crisis in government itself, with two changes of prime minister during the drought period, due to tensions between the executive and parliament which, apparently, also did not react to the drought crisis.⁶⁰

While the king's government had been relatively popular before those events, this enormous failure, in the centre and the provinces, undermined its legitimacy. When Sardar Daud toppled the king in 1973, during one of his trips abroad (he was on a medical cure in Italy), the population remained unmoved and there was no resistance in his defence – making this episode an early example, and warning, how crisis and bad governance can seriously undermine popular support for a government.⁶¹

7 CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that Afghanistan's crisis started neither in 2001, after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, nor even in 1979, with the Soviet military intervention. These events were the outcome of developments that had shaped Afghanistan society since the beginning of the twentieth century, marked by a series of attempts to reform and modernise the country and the subsequent counter-reaction by conservative forces.

Implemented top-down, the reforms often seem to have failed because their more radical proponents (Amanullah 1919–29, the PDPA governments 1978–92) lost political power to their conservative opponents. But the reforms changed Afghan society in the long run nevertheless. The most

striking examples are the expansion of the educational and private economic sectors. But they also produced more conflict potential because the forces set free could not be constructively integrated into the political system that remained abrasive to innovation and fed different strands of the opposition.

As the author has shown in earlier papers,⁶² the movement of Afghan reformists had some continuity, both in personnel and programme, despite having been interrupted by repeated government crackdowns – from the constitutionalist and Young Afghan movements (1902–1919) via the activists of the Wesh Zalmian movement (1947–52) and the 'decade of democracy' (1964–73) to those who tried to utilise the limited political space emerging at the end of late President Dr Najibullah's regime when he established a controlled multi-party system. After the fall of the Taleban regime in 2001, it resurfaced from the political underground and the diaspora: some political parties see themselves in the tradition of the constitutional movements.

It is significant that the slower reform process between 1929 and 1973 met almost no violent resistance. Modernisation was only violently resisted when it came in the context of outside military intervention, as between 1978 and 1989 (by the Soviets) and after 2001 (by the US-led alliance), and its opponents were able to label it as a threat to 'Afghan culture' and religion and to politically mobilise significant parts of the Afghan population against it. Modernisation as such – if limited to technology (for example weapons and communication technology), and even in the education sector – is not contentious even for Islamists. This reflects the positions of earlier pan-Islamist modernisers like Seyyed Jamaluddin Afghani (1838/39–97) who had argued that Muslims should adapt 'Western' technology while sticking (or returning) to the 'original' values of Islam in order to withstand the (Western) European colonial expansion.⁶³

⁶⁰ Telegram 4884 From the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 22 August 1972, 1233Z, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972, Doc 364, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d364>; Telegram 5348 From the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 14 September 1972, 1200Z, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972, Doc 365, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d365>.

⁶¹ The author heard such reports time and again during numerous encounters with Afghans between 2000 and now. Apart from the fact that Daud came from the king's family as well (and was known from his time as prime minister in 1953–63 as someone who 'gets things done'), not many Afghans saw a difference between a monarchy and a republic.

⁶² Ruttig, 'Islamists, Leftists' [see FN 9]; Ruttig, 'Afghanistan's Early Reformists' [see FN 9].

⁶³ Rudolph Peters, 'Erneuerungsbewegungen im Islam vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert und die Rolle des Islams in der neueren Geschichte: Antikolonialismus und Nationalismus', in: Werner Ende and Udo Steinbach (eds), *Der Islam in der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, 120. Today, education, including of girls, has gained wide acceptance among the Afghan population after positive experience in the diaspora where it provided the younger generation with jobs. It becomes contentious where schools become a battlefield for influence between the state and insurgents. See also:

A combination of factors, half-hearted political reform under the monarchy, inner-regime tensions as well as demographic and even ecological ones, led to a first culmination of conflict in 1973.⁶⁴ Then, a previously stable statehood came into crisis when some political actors rediscovered and used military violence as a means for regime change. This led to a small-scale insurgency and a series of rapidly changing dictatorial regimes (both Islamist and left wing), and spiralled into an escalating armed conflict between different factions that drew in outside support either directly (the USSR) or indirectly (Pakistan and the US). This internationalisation of conflict led to further military escalation. It is important to keep these original causes of crisis in mind when looking at Afghanistan's recent, more well-known history and when trying to figure out how to overcome the conflicts of the present.

Antonio Giustozzi and Claudio Franco, 'The Battle for Schools: The Taleban and State Education', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, Thematic Report 08/2011, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2349>. Even the Taleban have meanwhile widely dropped their enmity to modern communication, using the internet, including video technology.

⁶⁴ Up to 1973, 'the last functioning political system existed [in Afghanistan] that combined a certain degree of modernity and social stability' (and therefore legitimacy) – even when, till then, 'no Afghan government succeeded in creating structures that could de facto translate its authority down to the local level'. Christine Noelle-Karimi, 'The Loya Jirga – An Effective Political Tool? A Historical Overview', in Christine Noelle-Karimi, Conrad Schetter and Reinhart Schlagintweit (eds), *Afghanistan – A Country Without a State?*, IKO-Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, Frankfurt am Main 2002, 37; Citha D. Maaß, 'Afghanistan: Staatsaufbau ohne Staat', *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, Berlin 2007, 10.

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