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Ideology without Leadership

The Rise and Decline of Maoism in Afghanistan

This paper is part of an AAN series that looks at the development of political parties and movements in Afghanistan. The aim of the series is to fill the gaps that exist in the current literature by exploring the role of political parties in the contemporary political system and by documenting the history of political movements that continue to play an important role or have been often overlooked.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1960s were an important, formative decade in the history of Afghanistan. Following the country's transformation into a constitutional monarchy in 1964, three ideological currents emerged to compete for the loyalty of a growing educated class in Kabul and other urban centres. At the heart of the ideological debates were concerns about the slow pace of socio-economic development and political reforms. These intellectual debates soon linked up with political dynamics at home and abroad, deeply influencing the tumultuous fate of the country through the following decades until the present.

The first to appear was the Hezb-e Dimokratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan, or People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the main proponent of Soviet-style socialism in Afghanistan, in 1965. The formation of the Maoist Sazman-e Jawanan-e Mutaraqi, or Progressive Youth Organisation (SaJaM/PYO)

followed in 1966. In 1969 a third current was organised around Jawanan-e Musalman, or the Muslim Youth,¹ inspired by the ideology of the international Muslim Brotherhood. Kabul's university and streets became the scenes of a fierce and at times violent competition between supporters of those different ideological groups.

The Maoists, that is SaJaM/PYO, became better known in Afghanistan as the Shola'i, after *Sholaye Jawed* (Eternal Flame),² its first newspaper

¹ It is important to note that religiously motivated political activism has a much longer history in the country. Roy suggests that the first Islamic circle of this period was formed around 1958. See Olivier Roy, 'The Origins of the Islamist Movement in Afghanistan', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 3, no 2, 1984, 117.

² Actually, it should be written Sho'la, but for better readability we leave out the ('), which stands for the letter 'ain'. We write 'Shola'i' for the members of the organisation, though, to avoid pronunciation as 'Sholay'.

publication in 1968. An important part of the Maoist's strategy was the denunciation of PDPA's ideology as 'revisionist and [an] extension of [Soviet] social imperialism'. The Maoists argued that Afghanistan bore greater similarities to pre-revolutionary China in its level of socio-economic development than it did to Russia'. Unlike their PDPA rivals, they refused to participate in the country's parliamentary elections and instead stressed the mobilisation of the peasantry as the main revolutionary force on the path to socialism.

In a predominantly rural country where labour hardly existed as a class, a 'protracted war' by revolutionary peasants might have offered greater prospects for a socialist revolution but the challenges of organising a 'people's army' from among the Afghans peasants and launching a communist party were more difficult than it first seemed to the proponents of this theory. In practice, the PDPA's strategy of a 'peaceful transition to socialism' – which did not remain peaceful for long – proved more fruitful. In 1965, four of the party's members were elected to the Wolesi Jirga (the lower house of the Afghan parliament) under the new constitutional system; in 1973 it supported Muhammad Daud Khan's military coup d'état that deposed the monarchy, becoming an important player in his government, and in 1978 it seized power through its own coup. By contrast, SaJaM was dissolved in 1972 after intense internal ideological debates failed to produce a common strategy of the movement, setting in motion an endless tendency towards factionalism and fragmentation.

The reasons for the decline of Maoism in Afghanistan are not entirely endogenous. Perhaps, a major cause was the adverse national and international environment in which the Maoist movement developed. During the war between the mujahedin and the Soviet-backed regime in the 1980s, the Afghan Maoist factions found themselves in an extremely vulnerable situation. Following the massive government crackdown in cities in the aftermath of the PDPA's 27 April (7 Saur) 1978 coup, more Maoist groups were forced to move into the countryside. These groups took part in a number of revolts against the regime across the country but soon found themselves in deadly conflicts with local mujahedin organisations, as

Islamicisation and local power struggles became important features of the war. Furthermore, both the PDPA and the mujahedin received enormous material and political support from the Soviet Union and Western and Islamic countries respectively. In a situation where outside support became a key determinant of success and survival, the Maoists starved and China, their most likely ally, chose to support the mujahedin. As a strategy of survival, most Maoists were forced to seek the protection of mujahedin organisations, which they joined, often at the cost of abandoning or significantly moderating their ideological aspirations. Independent survival, as the experience of the Nimruz Front shows, was only possible by adopting political pragmatism at the cost of ideological rhetoric.

The tendency towards division and incessant fragmentation among Maoists in Afghanistan may not be an encouraging sign for other ideological movements in the country. However, native movements tend to lose control of their own fate when countries descend into chaos and conflict. The history of the Maoist movement in Afghanistan is a clear example of this phenomenon. Much about the war and conflict in Afghanistan can be attributed to internal controversies, but it is also clear that the native intellectual movements in the country were dominated and overwhelmed by powerful political developments emanating from abroad before they were given the chance to reach maturity.

1. INTRODUCTION

For a general observer of Afghanistan today, a Maoist movement may not feature highly in the political landscape of the country. Yet, one may find significant groups and individuals who were once devout supporters of a Chinese-style revolution. For two decades, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, Maoism was one of Afghanistan's most relevant and dynamic political-ideological movements. It competed with the pro-Soviet tendency towards leftism and Islamism. Divided by internal differences, it was caught by surprise by the 1978 coup by the pro-Soviet left after which the new rulers specifically targeted their dissident co-leftists

with fierce violence. After the Soviet military intervention in late 1979 and the rise of the Islamist resistance, the Maoists found themselves between two vicious enemies who each fought them mercilessly. Most Maoist leaders perished, the movement lost the initial strength it had when it led some of the first post-1978 rebellions. The surviving leaders regrouped after the Taleban regime, most of them abandoning or significantly moderating their revolutionary ideology and joining new democratic groups.

The Maoist movement of Afghanistan was rooted in the intellectual and student circles of the 1960s that started more-organised political activities when the new constitution of 1964 declared the country a constitutional monarchy. This constitution recognised for the first time the rights of the country's citizens to political association and freedom of expression.

The 1964-73 period became known as the 'decade of democracy' in the history of Afghanistan. The thaw in the political climate paved the way for an unprecedented mushrooming of political movements and parties in the country. Previously suppressed study circles and underground associations took advantage of the relatively free political environment to compete for ideological and political influence among the nascent intelligentsia and urban middle class of Kabul and other major urban centres.

This first longer-lasting democratic experiment in Afghan history ended after ten years, when the constitution was abrogated in 1973 as a result of a coup d'état. The coup was led by Muhammad Daud Khan, a cousin of King Zahir Shah, who declared the country a republic and made it a one-party state, a status enshrined in the new constitution of February 1977.

However, the legacy of the ideological struggles during this decade of democracy was to determine the fault lines of Afghan politics for the following three decades. Broadly speaking, three major ideological tendencies dominated the Afghan political struggle during the decade of democracy. In January 1965, the *Hezb-e Dimokratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan* (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, HDK/A/PDPA) was born and became the main protagonist of

the pro-Soviet political movement in the country. Nine months later, the *Sazman-e Jawanan-e Mutaraqiqi* (Progressive Youth Organisation, SaJaM/PYO) was formed to advocate a Chinese-style peasant revolution, declaring the pro-Soviet activists 'revisionists', 'opportunists' and stooges of 'social imperialism'. The third current was organised around the *Jawanan-e Musalman* or Muslim youth, a local organisation inspired by the international Muslim Brotherhood. It represented political Islamism among the students and teachers of Kabul's university campuses. The Islamist current also included *Khuddam ul-Furqan*, its madrassa-based and more-rural wing. Proponents of the two leftist tendencies were strongly critical of the slow pace of political and socio-economic development in the country and promoted a radical agenda for change. The Islamists grew as a reaction against the growing influence of leftism.

This study aims to explain the emergence and the changing fate of the Maoist movement in the turbulent history of the country in recent decades. The first section will provide a brief overview of the key actors and the context in which Maoism emerged in the country; the second will deal with how internal ideological debates and disagreements caused the movement to stagnate; the third will explain how a fragmented movement adopted tactics and strategies to survive amid the conflict and violence between the 'mujahedin' and the successive PDPA governments in the 1980s. Finally, we will conclude by highlighting the key trends and weakness of the movement and briefly looking at the post-2001 activities of surviving Maoists.

The key argument of this paper is that endless internal ideological disagreements, the absence of a united and visible political leadership and the inability to mobilise the peasantry as the intended social base undermined the long-term prospect of the movement in a highly competitive and fast-changing national and regional environment in which the Maoists were wedged in a vulnerable position between two violent enemies, the pro-Soviet PDPA and their Soviet allies on one hand and the armed Islamists on the other, without political or material support from the outside world. The

ideological disputes and fragmentation of the movement may appear irrelevant today, but the debates that occurred within the movement and its relationship with other ideological and political currents shed light on that period of history.

The information used in this paper is primarily based on a series of interviews and conversations the author conducted over the recent years with former Afghan Maoists and political activists more broadly. In view of a long history of persecution and marginalisation of the Maoist activists as well as continuing controversies regarding the history of the movement and individual's role and responsibilities, nearly all respondents expressed an interest to remain anonymous. The author has also consulted secondary sources including organisational documents available in the internet, although they were cited as sources only if they were supported by primary source interviews or multiple sources. It is also important to note that the history of the Maoist movement in Afghanistan has largely been neglected by Afghan and foreign researchers and the death or exile of most leaders and organisers of the movement during the 1970s and 1980s leave significant gaps in the Maoist organisations' history and their leaders' biographies that still need to be filled. As a result, this paper should be seen as a first effort, despite potential gaps and errors, to understand this largely neglected but important aspect of the history of political ideologies and movements in Afghanistan.

2. THE EARLY YEARS OF THE MAOIST MOVEMENT

Like the PDPA and Islamists, the history of the Afghan Maoist movement is rooted in the pre-1964 urban middle-class intellectual circles of the broader reformist and constitutionalist movements. These circles experienced a short experiment with political openness in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This openness began under Prime Minister Shah Mahmud (1946-53) who had replaced his much-more-repressive brother Muhammad Hashem Khan. He allowed relatively free parliamentary elections in 1949 in which the intellectual circles actively

participated. Five leading reformers were elected into the Wolesi Jirga where they established a reformist faction called Jabha-ye Melli (National Front), named after nationalist prime Minister Mosadegh in neighbouring Iran. Eleven other MPs joined, and its reformist agenda was supported by some 20 to 30 more deputies. The group promoted a more-liberal press law which was passed in January 1951 and opened the way for a handful of regular but short-lived publications that supported their agenda. When activists from groups around two of the newspapers, *Neda-ye Khalq* and *Watan*, announced the formation of political parties, Hezb-e Khalq (People's Party) and Hezb-e Watan (Fatherland Party), the government cracked down and closed the publications. Some of the activists were jailed, others exiled and some continued underground activities.³

Between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s, these activists regrouped in small study groups usually known as *mahfel*. Most of them were based in Kabul, meeting in private homes. Before the adoption of the 1964 constitution, which declared the country a constitutional monarchy and guaranteed the right to political association and freedom of the press, these movements were in their embryonic stages of development and mostly operated as informal underground networks.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Marxist literature was introduced to a growing number of Afghan intellectuals and university students. The books came mostly through Iran, Pakistan and India. Iranian leftist organisations such as the Hezb-e Tudeh (Party of the Masses, the Iranian communist party) with its various off-shoots – including the Mujahedin-e Khalq and Fedayin-e Khalq – played an influential role in introducing Marxist ideas to the Afghan educated class. Marxist books translated by Iranians were secretly smuggled across the border and distributed in Afghanistan. Because the Iranian translations were in Farsi, very similar to Dari (the lingua franca of Afghanistan spoken by the intellectual class of Afghanistan) the Afghan left

³ Thomas Ruttig, Afghanistan's Early Reformists: Mahmud Tarzi's Ideas and Their Influence on the Wesh Zalmian Movement, AAN Occasional Paper 01/2011, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, April 2011, 6-7.

of both Soviet and Chinese styles was heavily influenced by the ideological debate in Iran itself. *Darafsh-e Sorkh* (Red Banner), a publication of the *Sazman-e Enqelabi Iran* (Revolutionary Organisation of Iran), a splinter group of Hezb-e Tudeh, was reaching readers in Afghanistan through Afghans in Germany or was simply smuggled across the border. As it will be shown later, the Afghan Maoists were particularly strong across the western provinces of Herat, Farah and Nimruz. This can be attributed to their geographical proximity to Iran, which made them susceptible to Maoist influence from across the border. Similarly, the *Mazdoor Kisan Party* (Workers and Peasants Party) of Pakistan (a Maoist party struggling in the late 1960s and 1970s to instigate a peasant revolution in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan) was providing inspiration to Maoists across the border.⁴

The small study circles in which the later Afghan Maoists were organised were led by prominent intellectuals and well-known reformist figures. These included the Mahmudi family from Kabul (see below), the brothers Akram Yari and Sadiq Yari (sons of a landholding Hazara family from Jaghori district of Ghazni) and of Wasif Bakhtari (a famous poet and writer from the northern province of Balkh). Later circles led by Muhammad Osman Landai (a Pashtun from Laghman and science lecturer at Kabul University) and Abdullah Rastakhez (a teacher from Herat) also joined the movement.

Two families played the central role in introducing Maoism to the country, the Mahmudi family and the Yari family. Most prominent of the Mahmudi family was Abdur Rahman Mahmudi (1909-61), a well-known intellectual and leading figure of the constitutional and reformist movement of the 1940s and 1950s. He was the grandson of Mahmud Khan, a dissident and well-off landowner who was exiled to Kashmir by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (1881-1901) and recalled to the country during the time of Amir Habibullah (1901-19). Upon the family's return to Kabul, which appears to be in the early years of Habibullah's reign when many other

dissidents exiled under Amir Abdur Rahman Khan were allowed or invited to return to the country, Mahmud Khan opened a book shop in Kabul and Mirza Muhammad Azam, his son and father of Abdur Rahman Mahmudi, worked at the Ministry of Finance. Abdur Rahman attended Habibia High School, the first modern school, opened in 1903, in Kabul. The school included Turkish and Indian teachers and trained some of the first reformist and intellectual figures of the country.⁵

Mahmudi was one also of the first to graduate from the Medical Faculty of Kabul University in 1938. Henceforth, he combined medical practice with social activism, offering free medical services to the poor. In 1949 he was elected as member of parliament from Kabul with 14,000 votes, one of the highest in the country.⁶ He established *Neda-ye Khalq* (People's Voice), an independent newspaper which was banned by the government in July 1951, only four months after it was launched. This happened after it had published the charter of a political party, *Hezb-e Khalq* (People's Party), taking a step too far for the government, which was ready to tolerate free media but not political parties.

By most accounts, Mahmudi was not a communist, but his party's programme showed strong tendencies towards the left. The short 24-article document committed its members to an Islamic constitutional monarchy and democratic principles. It stressed the fight against social injustice and the promotion of equality among all citizens of the country as central goals of the party. In particular, it demanded the elimination of exploitation and oppression and of what it called the 'captivity of the *kargar*' (worker).⁷

In his role as a member of parliament and critic of the government, Mahmudi established his profile as one of the most serious and uncompromising figures of the reform movement in the country. He was to pay the

⁴ Author's interview with former Afghan Maoists, Kabul, July 2008.

⁵ Gholam Muhammad Ghoobar, *Afghanistan dar masir-e tarikh [Afghanistan in the Course of History]*, Vol II, 4th ed., Peshawar, Maiwand Publications 1384 [2005], 702-4.

⁶ Abdur Rahman Mahmudi, *Nokhbagan [The Elite]*, Kabul, Maiwand Publications 2005, 16.

⁷ Ibid; articles 5, 9 and 12 of the Constitution of the Hezb-e Khalq, 9-14.

cost for such a reputation: in July 1952 while running for the eighth parliament, the government arrested him along with 15 other members of his party just two days before the elections. This marked the beginning of a government crackdown and repression of reformist figures under Prime Minister Daud Khan who ruled from 1953 to 1963. Mahmudi remained in prison until 1961, the year he died of poor health, only two months after his release.

As the political movements gained greater momentum, in January 1965 the PDPA was formed. Just nine months later, in 1966, small Maoist study circles merged together to create SaJaM. Following Abdur Rahman Mahmudi's death, his nephews and other family members formed the backbone of the Maoist movement's leadership in its early days. Taking advantage of the reputation of the family, SaJaM placed the Mahmudis at the forefront of the movement. Rahim Mahmudi became the editor-in-chief of the *Shola-ye Jawed* (Eternal Flame) magazine, the only legal mouthpiece of the Maoist movement, founded in April 1968.⁸ In fact, he had first planned to re-launch *Neda-ye Khalq*; *Shola-ye Jawed* was only approved by the government after a third application was launched. In his editorial for the first issue of the newspaper, he did not hesitate to stress the continuity and connection between both publications:

Sixteen years ago, the national *Neda-ye Khalq* magazine was stopped by the order of the reactionary ruling class. After that, a long political repression dominated all aspects of life of the nation of Afghanistan . . . I wanted to continue the job of the late founder of the *Neda-ye Khalq* by restarting the publication of the magazine.⁹

The other important family were the Yaris. Akram Yari (1940-79), a graduate of the Science Faculty of Kabul University and a high-school teacher in Kabul, and Sadiq Yari, a physiology

lecturer at the Medical Faculty of Kabul University, emerged as theoretical figures of the Maoist movement. Akram was renowned for his ideological knowledge and expertise.¹⁰

2.1 The SaJaM Movement

Little is known about the composition, the structure and the real size of the SaJaM and the circumstances in which it was established. According to one account, it included some 150 members, mainly in Kabul and a few other provincial centres. Others allege the secrecy in the organisation was such that even some senior figures in the broader movement were not informed of its existence.¹¹ Unlike the PDPA or other organisations formed at that time, the SaJaM either did not produce organisational documents or, if it did, the documents have not been revealed to the public yet or were lost. Nonetheless, a number of well-known persons today are cited as founding figures of the movement. These include Muhammad Akram Yari, Sadiq Yari, Mohammad Ishaq Negargar (better known as Moztareb Bakhtari), Wasif Bakhtari, Engineer Muhammad Osman, Hadi Mahmudi, Abdullah Mahmudi, Rahim Mahmudi, Doctor Ain Ali Bunyad and Saidal Sokhandan. Many former SaJaM members also agree that Akram Yari was speaking as the most senior leader of the movement. As will be shown below, the secretive nature of leadership was to have important consequences for the future direction of the movement, particularly during the years of repression and war. In the face of widespread repression and persecution that began under Daud Khan and intensified under the PDPA, the Maoists suffered badly from lacking coherent political and organisational leadership and direction.

The formation of the PDPA and SaJaM marked the split of the Afghan leftists along pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet lines. The PDPA was following the strategy of Khrushchev, which the Soviet

¹⁰ Author's interviews with various former Maoist activists, 2008-09, Kabul.

¹¹ It is alleged that Eng. Muhammad Osman split from the movement and wrote his critique in protest after he was informed of the creation of the PYO while he was in prison in 1968. See for instance: 'Sazman-e jawanan-e mutaraqi', <http://www.payam-af-tab.com/>, (accessed May 2011).

⁸ The name of this publication, *Shola-ye Jawed*, widely became the shorthand for the Afghan Maoist movement, the Maoists being labelled Shola'is.

⁹ Rahim Mahmudi, *Shola-ye Jawed*, 1st edition, Kabul, 2 April 1968.

leader declared in the 1963 congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, that encouraged communist movements across the world to pursue peaceful transitions to socialism in their respective countries through participation in parliamentary elections. By contrast, Mao Zedong presented a strategy for taking power and implementing socialist revolutions, centred on what was called a protracted war, to surround cities with revolutionary peasant forces. Mao's ideological framework and military strategy in the Chinese revolution became the ideological and practical guidelines of the Afghan Maoists who believed the Chinese path to revolution and Mao's concept of neo-democracy were applicable to the situation of the country.¹²

In contrast to the PDPA leaders, the SaJaM organisers decided not to participate in the parliamentary elections of the 1960s. Instead, they focused their efforts and resources on protest activities. During the 1960s, SaJaM organised 14 strikes and rallies throughout the country. In June 1968, a demonstration it organised at the Jangalak Automotive Maintenance Repair Plant in Western Kabul demanding the formation of a labour union and a pay raise for the workers turned violent when some of the demonstrators started throwing rocks at government facilities in the centre of the city and clashed with the police.¹³ Following the incident, senior organisers of the movement were alleged to have instigated the violence and arrested. These included Mohammad Osman, Hadi Mahmudi, Sayed Kazem Dadgar and Moztarib Bakhtari of the Faculty of Literature; each received 13 years of imprisonment on account of organising anti-state activities and were eventually released through a presidential decree by Daud Khan in August 1973. The sentences for others ranged from fines of 2,000 Afghani to ten years of imprisonment.¹⁴

SaJaM remained an underground organisation. Its main public activity was the publication of *Shola-ye Jawed* between April and July 1968. Its eleventh issue was collected by the government following the Jangalak demonstrations and its future publication banned. In its short lifespan, it focused on introducing an alternative to the Soviet-style communism in the country. It saw its mission as to 'prepare public opinion for deep social and political transformation based on neo-thought of the era'.¹⁵ It denounced the PDPA organisers as 'parliamentarist', 'opportunist' and 'revisionist' and stressed the overthrow of the socio-economic and political structures through an armed struggle as the only path to socialism.¹⁶

Kabul University campus emerged as the hotbed of this intense ideological struggle between different leftist tendencies and between them and the Islamists. After its establishment in 1931, the lecturers and students of the university became some of the main proponents of new ideologies and advocates of radical political and socio-economic change. During the 'decade of democracy', Kabul experienced three successive waves of student demonstrations and strikes, in 1965, 1968-69 and 1971-72. Throughout this period, different groups on the left and the Islamist right fiercely competed for recruitment and loyalty among the members of this relatively small but growing and influential group in the society. As an indication of the government's desperate need to control the student crowds, it completely closed the universities in Kabul for a period of six months in 1968.¹⁷

During this period, the student movement in Kabul demanded the re-introduction and official recognition of a students' union' that could advocate for the student's rights. A similar, and the first ever, students' union (Ettehadia-ye Muhaselin) had been formed in 1950. But it was

¹² Hafizullah Emadi, 'Radical Political Movements in Afghanistan and Their Politics of Peoples' Empowerment and Liberation', *Central Asian Survey* 4, 2001, 433.

¹³ During the year, two demonstrations were organised at the plant, with the first one in May.

¹⁴ Author's interview with a student activist of the 1960s, Kabul, December 2009; see also the

Chronology of Workers Strikes in 1968, in Emadi, 'Radical Political Movements' [see FN 12].

¹⁵ Mahmudi, *Shola-ye Jawed* [see FN 8].

¹⁶ Author's interviews with former Afghan Maoists, Kabul, July 2008 and December 2009.

¹⁷ For more, see Sabahuddin Kushkaki, *Daha-ye Qanun-e Asasi [The Decade of the Constitution]*, Peshawar, Maiwand Publications 1999, 143-6 and 156-7.

not considered a good precedent by the government because leaders with a leftist tendency had dominated half of its central committee and membership, and its theatre shows, allegorising class conflict, had attracted audiences beyond the university campus, including high school students and politically active groups in the city. Fearing the consequences of an increasingly active and critical student body, the government had been quick to ban the union seven months after it was formed.¹⁸ Once re-established, the 1960s' leftists believed, such a union could become a key vehicle for their political and ideological organisation and propaganda.

Under intense pressure, the government finally agreed to the formation of a new students' union in 1969. It was soon followed by the establishment of the Union of Lecturers of Universities of Afghanistan in 1971. The leadership and ideological direction of both unions became a matter of intense competition between those with leftist tendencies – the pro-Moscow PDPA and the pro-Beijing Maoists – and the Islamists. The Maoists initially emerged as the strongest players. Between 1970 and 1972, they dominated the student's union. Twenty-two of the 43 members of the Supreme Council of the Union were Maoists, which clearly placed them in a much stronger position than their Islamist and PDPA rivals.¹⁹ As an indication of the influence of various groups in the lecturers' union, three out of nine individuals elected as permanent members of its executive committee were Maoists, three were independent individuals and the other three came from other groups.²⁰

¹⁸ Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar masir-e tarikh* [see FN 5], 260-61; also Ehsan Lemar 'Shast salegi awwalin ettehadia-ye mohaselin Afghanistan: khazan 1328 [Sixtieth Anniversary of the First Students Union of Afghanistan: autumn 1949], <http://www.khawaran.com/>, accessed in May 2009.

¹⁹ Author's interview with a former Maoist, Kabul, 22 June 2008; see also Basir Ahmed Dawlatabadi, *Shenasnama-ye ahzab wa jeryanat-e siyasi-ye Afghanistan [An Introduction to Political Parties and Currents in Afghanistan]*, Qom, Dawlatabadi 1992, 71-73.

²⁰ Azadmanish, 'Ettehadia-ye Ustadan-e Pohantunhaye Afghanistan [Union of Lecturers of Universities of

As the country prepared for a constitutional monarchy, all these political groups took advantage of the situation and made efforts to assert themselves on the political stage of the country. PDPA members Babrak Karmal, Hafizullah Amin, Anahita Ratebzad and Saleh Mohammed Zerai were elected to the first national assembly under the new 1964 constitution. On 25 October 1965 (3 Aqrab 1344), when the parliament was due to cast a vote of confidence for the proposed cabinet of Doctor Muhammad Yusuf, leftist students of both Maoist and pro-Soviet tendencies marched towards the parliament in large numbers. The supporters of the PDPA parliamentarians went to see how their representatives were voting. By contrast, Maoist students appeared in significant numbers to disrupt the sessions in protest against parliamentary politics. In the ensuing clashes between the students and police, three students were shot dead and the prime minister was forced to submit his resignation on the following day.²¹

The PDPA leaders and sympathisers elected during the parliamentary elections had constituted a relatively small but politically organised and assertive group within the parliament. They gradually established their profiles as political leaders by focusing on key issues such as the slow pace of socio-economic development, the inability and inefficiency of the state to deliver services, corruption and mismanagement in the state institutions and growing foreign debts.²² Another factor that placed the PDPA in an advantageous competitive position was the growing relationship between the Soviet Union and the Afghan government. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Soviet Union became one of the major development partners of the Afghan government. Among other initiatives, it offered scholarships and training opportunities for thousands of Afghan university students. Many of the Soviet graduates were influenced by Soviet ideology and provided an opportunity for activists of the PDPA party to expand their

Afghanistan]', February 2010, <http://www.said-afghani.org>.

²¹ Kushkaki, *The Decade of the Constitution*, 46-49 [see FN 17].

²² *Ibid*, 116 and 120-21.

influence in various Afghan government agencies where many of them were employed after their return.

The role of the Mahmudi and Yari families in the foundation of the Maoist movement largely shaped its composition and social character. As these were Dari-speaking families, and although most of their leaders during this period denied the role of ethnicity and language in the process of social revolution, by virtue of their social orientation and ethnic background they tended to gain the support of Dari speakers and ethnic minorities. For instance, Akram Yari (a Hazara) rejected the ethnic discourse gaining popularity among Hazara circles in the 1960s. He argued that class struggle was the key to resolving all problems in the country, including ethnic conflicts and inequalities. A disproportionately high number of Hazara students and political activists were either members of various Maoist organisations or had some level of sympathy for the movement.²³

Arguably, the historical relationship between the country's ethnic communities and the central government played a role in determining the social character and ideological orientation of Afghan political movements. For instance, Hazaras had been historically persecuted and denied any significant political role in the government since the consolidation of central power under King Abdur Rahman Khan in the 1890s. Therefore, members of this ethnic community had little hope of infiltrating the government and bringing about social change through reforms. Hazaras were socially and politically looked down at in Kabul in those days and had little presence in the government, particularly in its security and defence agencies. Thus, a Maoist strategy of overthrowing the government through a protracted people's war appeared more attractive. By contrast, the Khalq faction of the PDPA was predominantly Pashtun and found it easier to infiltrate the armed forces; Parcham, more evenly mixed between Tajiks and Pashtuns, was also well positioned to infiltrate the government.²⁴

However, Hazara Maoists would quickly lose their predominance within the movement. As the movement fragmented, they amalgamated into the *Sazman-e Reha'i-bakhsh-e Khalq-e Afghanistan* (SRKhA or Afghanistan's People's Liberation Organisation – see below), which practically collapsed in the face of widespread arrests and executions in the first few months of the PDPA rule. Fleeing from Kabul, some managed to establish relationships with leaders of *Shura-ye Ettfaq*, the indigenous movement of Hazaras that overthrew the PDPA government structure in the Hazarajat region in 1979. But they soon fell out with the more conservative section of the clergy and local notables. With the arrival of radical Islamists in the early 1980s, a wave of hostile propaganda campaigns and assassinations drove the Maoists out of the region.²⁵

3. INTERNAL IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLES AND SELF-INTROSPECTION FRAGMENT THE MOVEMENT

Since their emergence, the Afghan Maoists positioned themselves against both the PDPA and the Islamists. Denouncing the PDPA organisers as revisionists and the Islamists as reactionaries, the Maoist students battled with both in Kabul's university campuses and city streets. In one of the clashes at Kabul University, Saydal Sokhandan, a prominent Maoist organiser and speaker, a Pashtun from Logar province, was killed by Islamists armed with knives and sticks. This incident and the growing weakness of the Maoists in comparison with the Islamists sparked an intense debate among the movement's leaders. It revealed that despite the larger support base among the youth and their ambition to organise a peasant revolution, the SajaM leaders were unable to stand to the challenge raised by the (then) numerically much

²³ Author's interview with a Hazara political activist of the 1960s, Kabul, July 2008.

²⁴ Author's interviews with activists of the 1960s, Kabul, June-July 2008.

²⁵ See Niamatullah Ibrahim, 'The Failure of a Clerical Proto-State: Hazarajat, 1979-1984', Crisis States Working Papers Series 2, *Crisis States Research Centre*, London, 2006, 6.

smaller but relatively better organised Islamists.²⁶

SaJaM's political and military strategy included three key components: giving a predominant role to the peasants in the transition to socialism, surrounding cities with rural revolutionary forces and starting a protracted people's war against the regime. To achieve these goals, SaJaM believed in building a communist party (distinct from the 'revisionist' PDPA), a people's army and a united national front of revolutionary forces as instruments of the revolution. But SaJaM did not consider itself a party yet. It saw itself as an organisation that would facilitate the formation of the true communist party of the country and prepare the ground for a protracted people's war. However, as the political and ideological struggle with the PDPA and Islamists intensified, the need for a more-assertive political leadership and organisational structure came to the fore. Some sections of the movement started criticising the leaders for their apparent inability to take advantage of the relatively larger support base among the students and announce the establishment of a communist party. In reality, SaJaM was acting like a front for the old study circles and lacked the necessary ideological cohesion to act as an organisation. It faced an incessant internal ideological debate about the genuineness of various ideological arguments. For instance, practical steps to announce a communist political party and expand activities to the village level were derailed by continuing debates about the criterion and timing of the formation of a genuine political party and the role and mobilisation of the peasantry. Gradually the debate about whether the organisation was meeting the criteria required to launch a communist party polarised the movement's leaders. These ideological arguments had real implications for the ability of the movement to expand and compete with the Islamist and PDPA rivals.

A major barrier against further expansion of the movement and a key source of internal discussion was the contradiction between its urban middle-class character (with a sprinkling of scions of rural aristocratic families) and its

ideological emphasis on the central role of the peasantry in bringing about a revolution. But in reality there was little clarity on how the movement could expand to mobilise and encompass the peasants. This was the matter of an intense debate. Towards the end of the 1970s, intellectual disagreements still hampered its ability to devise a strategy of peasant mobilisation, and its outreach rarely extended beyond a limited number of workers.

The period of the 1970s was crucial for the history of the Maoist movement in the country. With Daud Khan's coup in 1973 and his announcement of a one-party state, the country's experiment with democracy was coming to an end. Members of the PDPA party played an important role in planning and orchestrating the coup. While the PDPA's policy of infiltrating government agencies was bearing fruit, the SaJaM leaders were gradually teetering on the edge of internal fragmentation and collapse. Henceforth, in a rapidly changing political environment, the Maoist movement fell prey to endless internal skirmishes and fragmentation, perhaps the biggest cause of its decline. On one hand, the fast pace of change necessitated more-pragmatic leadership and an end to the internal ideological arguments; on the other, it reinforced these internal disagreements as different ideological lines suggested different responses. While SaJaM rejected the parliamentary path to power as opportunism and revisionism, it failed to come up with a clear united strategy for waging the people's war and orchestrating a peasant revolution. Thus, the movement's different splinter groups entangled themselves in ideological debates; a lot of its efforts were focused on a rather theoretical criticism of Soviet-style communism and its non-capitalist path to socialism.²⁷

Signs of internal fractures and fragmentation had been emerging for some time. By 1970, a significant number of the movement's leaders, critical of the performance and strategies of the SaJaM, became known as *enteqadeyun* (criticisers). They launched a series of attacks on the strategies of the SaJaM leaders. A major critique was launched by Engineer Osman, who

²⁶ Emadi, 'Radical Political Movements', 436 [see FN 12].

²⁷ Author's interviews with former Afghan Maoists, Kabul, July and December 2009.

was known pejoratively as *Landai*, meaning 'short'. A native of Laghman, he was a lecturer of science at Kabul University and a regular contributor to *Shola-ye Jawed*. He published a document called *Pasmanzar-e Tarikhi* ('Historical Background') in which he questioned the ability of the leadership to take the movement forward in the face of rivalries with other groups and repression by the government and accused it of secretly pursuing personality-driven failed policies. Osman was unable to present an alternative strategy and platform for the future of the movement. Instead, he quit political activism and resumed an ordinary life as a science teacher in Kabul city. This meant that he survived the upcoming government crackdown against other members of the movement.²⁸

Doctor Faiz Ahmad (1946-86), a Kandahari Pashtun from an aristocratic Muhammadzai family and son of a 1960s parliamentarian, was another key figure among the *enteqadeyun*. A middle-rank member of the movement in its early days, he highlighted the organisation's inability to form a party and extend its reach to the peasantry.²⁹ In 1972, the crucial self-introspection year, he published a document titled 'Reject Opportunism and Forward towards the Red Revolution', in which he outlined his criticisms and future strategies. The critics argued that attention must be focused on the economic needs of the workers.³⁰ He also formed the *Grup-e Enqelab-e khalqha-ye Afghanistan* (Revolutionary Group of the People's of Afghanistan, in 1980 renamed *Sazman-e Reha'i-ye Afghanistan*, or Afghanistan Liberation Organisation). Another rising figure was Majid Kalakani (1939-80) who collaborated with Dr Faiz Ahmad (see below) in the Revolutionary Group but who also led a small group of his own known as *Mahfel-e Shamali* (Shamali Circle). They met in the Panjshir valley

where Dr. Faiz Ahmad was serving as a medical doctor in 1974. As will be shown below, the cooperation between the two figures did not last long. Three years later, ideological as well as tactical disagreements were surfacing between the two sides and Kalakani became the leader of SAMA, another key Maoist-led organisation.

To overcome the differences and mounting critiques, the leaders of the movement initiated an internal debate in 1972 that became known as the 'self-introspection process'. Little is known about how the debates were conducted but from interviews with the former Maoists, it appears a general meeting was secretly held in Kabul in which the leaders of the movement came under mounting criticism from the lower and younger members. For the participants, this process meant the de facto dissolution of the SajaM in that year.³¹

The incessant internal ideological debates were reinforced by divisions that emerged in the international pro-Beijing leftist movement. With the death of Mao in 1976 and the ensuing political and economic reforms under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the pro-Chinese internationalist communist movement split, with important consequences in countries like Afghanistan. Under Deng the role of ideology in determining political and socio-economic policy was greatly reduced; Chinese policies started being shaped by pragmatic considerations rather than ideological dictates. The decreasing role of Mao and his ideology under the leadership of Deng and his successors and the market-based economic reforms in the country made some Maoists across the world denounce the new leadership in China. Hence, the Maoist movement was deprived of a single united source of ideological inspiration and political leadership. In general the movement divided into three different ideological camps: One camp supported Deng's reforms; another group denounced his reforms as a betrayal of Marxism-Leninism and of Mao's thought; the third group followed Enver Hoxha, the leader of

²⁸ Author's interview with former Afghan Maoists, Kabul, December 2009.

²⁹ See Dr Faiz Ahmad's biography at <http://www.maoism.ru/alo/ahmad-e.htm>.

³⁰ 'Historical Overview of the Marxist Revolutionary Movement in Afghanistan and the Afghanistan Liberation Organisation (ALO)', <http://maoism.ru/alo/historical.htm>; author's interview with former Maoists, Kabul, December 2009.

³¹ 'Historical Overview of the Marxist Revolutionary Movement in Afghanistan and the Afghanistan Liberation Organisation (ALO)', <http://maoism.ru/alo/historical.htm>; author's interview with former Maoists, Kabul, December 2009.

the Albanian Labour Party, which sought to present an alternative to both the new tendencies of the Chinese and to Soviet-style communism.

Thus the Afghan Maoists concluded the 1970s with a virulent internal factionalism and fragmentation that have continued ever since. With the April 1978 coup by the PDPA, they found themselves in an increasingly hostile and unfavourable environment. The internal fragmentation mainly took the form of the previous *mahfel* or circles that had merged to establish SaJaM. The Mahmudi and Yari families announced their own separate organisations. Hadi Mahmudi established *Sazman-e Enqelab-e Watanparastan-e Waq'e'i* (SIWW, or Revolutionary Organisation of the Real Patriots) which, after the arrest of its five key leaders by KhAD in 1981, practically ceased to exist; Hadi Mahmudi left the country.³² Due to poor health, Akram Yari withdrew from his central role in the movement. Since 1969 he had struggled with poor health which gradually reduced his influence as the movement began to fracture after the self-introspection process. Sadiq Yari established the *Sazman-e Razmandegan-e Khalq-e Afghanistan* (SRKhA, or Organisation of Fighters of the People of Afghanistan) also known as Surkh-ha, 'the Reds'. Both organisations failed to grow much in the face of criticisms from the lower ranks and an increasingly hostile and complicated political situation for the movement across the country. These were the last, though unsuccessful, attempts by the former leaders of SaJaM to give a fresh impetus to the movement.³³

Unsurprisingly, the Maoist movement lost some of its popularity as a result of these developments. Perhaps, the unremitting internal ruptures and inability of the leadership to craft a clear united political strategy cost the movement its charm amongst its young followers, to the advantage of the more pragmatic and better-organised Islamists and the PDPA. Before the war started in 1978, the Khalq wing of the PDPA, with an estimated

2,000 members, was the largest political group, followed by the rival Parcham wing of the same party with an estimated membership of 1,500 - 2,000 and the Islamists and Maoists with around the same number of followers each.³⁴

4. THE PDPA COUP AND THE AFGHAN MAOISTS

The April coup of 1978 by the PDPA leaders threw the Maoist leaders into disarray and confusion. The PDPA leaders had succeeded in their bid for power through infiltration of the armed forces. How to respond to this challenge was a hotly contested and controversial issue for the movement.

As a result of the coup, the PDPA and Islamist leaders were positioned against one another. The conflict between the Islamists and the PDPA government gained an international dimension as the Islamists moved into Pakistan and Iran where they received massive foreign military and financial assistance. Incidentally, the beginning of jihad coincided with the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini and the coming to power of a military government in Pakistan under the leadership of Zia-ul Haq who started a process of islamisation in that country. Both governments extensively supported the anti-Soviet resistance movement of Afghanistan by hosting and supporting Islamic groups of various kinds. The military government of Pakistan had massive Western and Arabic funds and military assistance at its discretion for supporting radical Islamist ideologies.³⁵ Popular rebellions against the PDPA government across Afghanistan gradually came under the influence of the seven-largest Islamist parties, which claimed leadership of the jihad and emerged as the major sources of armaments and money after the Pakistani government excluded all other groups from receiving supplies.

³² Those arrested included Bashir Bahman, Latif Mahmudi and Masjidi, members of its executive committee.

³³ Author's interview with former Afghan Maoists, Kabul, July 2008 and December 2009.

³⁴ Louis Dupree, 'Red Flag over the Hindu-Kush', Part V, *American University Field Staff Report*, No 28, 1980.

³⁵ For more on this period see Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1990 and Gilles Dorransoro, *Revolution Unending*, London, Hurst 2005.

While the Islamists' steadfast external allies in the West and the Islamic world and the PDPA's ally the Soviet Union provided generous financial and military assistance, the Maoists were not so lucky. The People's Republic of China, their presumed external ally, threw its support behind the mujahedin, seeing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a threat to China's security and as an opportunity to put pressure on its rival in the socialist block to contain its expansionist ambitions. It called for the unconditional withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and between 1980 and 1985 provided an estimated USD 400 million worth of military support to the Islamic groups. Afghan Maoists have internally accused one another of receiving material assistance from China, as have non-Maoists, but there is no evidence of any significant Chinese assistance for revolutionary struggles of their type in the country.³⁶ Thus the Maoists were squeezed between two much more powerful, armed and resourceful political and military forces – they were denounced and persecuted as 'counter-revolutionaries' by the PDPA regime (and its Soviet allies) and as 'communists' by the Islamists. They (and other non-Islamist groups) had a tough choice: either join the 'recognised' Islamist groups or to be left without supplies.

Once in power, the PDPA leaders were determined to eliminate their longstanding Maoist rivals. In the face of widespread persecution and mass arrests, the Afghan Maoists were unable to find protection and assistance from outside the country. The whole political and military landscape quickly turned against the Maoists. In an increasingly Islamised war of resistance against the PDPA government and the Soviets, there was little room for the Maoists to assert themselves as an independent political and military force. Various Maoist organisations condemned the PDPA coup and declared war against it. Some of them participated in rebellions and attacks on the government in various parts of the country. In the early years of jihad, when the war was mostly spontaneous in character, the Maoists had a relatively better chance of playing a role. But as the war progressed, the Islamist

organisations, tied to foreign military and financial assistance networks in Pakistan and Iran, stepped in with radical Islamist ideologies. They quickly marginalised those traditional notables who, particularly when educated, were more likely to work with the Maoists because of their secular outlook and established their own political and military structures in most parts of the country. Those Islamists with a background in the ideological struggle of Kabul University in 1960s were particularly inimical towards the Maoists, as just another type of communist – although they participated in the fight against the Soviets. Most notable among them is the *Hezb-e Islami* of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was alleged to have been involved in the killing of Saydal Sokhandan (see above).³⁷ The Islamist propaganda created a wave of anti-communist feelings in most parts of the country, which deprived the Maoists of their limited social bases in areas where they operated. In many areas, the Islamists attacked the Maoists, using much superior weaponry. Angered by the Soviet invasion of the country and mobilised for a war inspired by religious sentiment, most mujahedin made little distinction between the PDPA and members of the Maoist organisations.³⁸

The Maoists were indeed hit hard by the PDPA regime. Within the first year or so of the April 1978 coup, most of the key organisers of what had been SaJaM were either captured and killed or forced into exile. Akram Yari who was living in his home district Jaghori since 1973 and Sadiq Yari who was working in Lashkargah (the provincial capital of Helmand) were arrested and transferred to Kabul's infamous Pul-e Charkhi prison. Similarly, hundreds and perhaps thousands of other real or perceived Maoists were rounded up from across the country and brought to the prison from where they have never returned. The crackdown on the Maoists was part of a massive repression against non-conforming and dissident groups that began soon after the ascent of the PDPA to power.

³⁶ See Emadi, 'Radical Political Movements' [see FN 12], 443-45.

³⁷ Author's interview with former Afghan Maoists, Kabul, July 2008 and December 2009.

³⁸ Author's interview with a former member of SAMA, Kabul, August 2009.

Many believe they were often quickly tortured to death or summarily executed.³⁹

SRKhA, the strongest group in the movement, became one of the main targets of the regime's persecution. In response to the coup, the group had distributed a number of papers and statements in Kabul in which it called upon the people to rise against what it described as the 'authoritarian rule of the PDPA backed by Soviet social imperialism'. At the same time, it failed to take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of its cadres and members who mainly lived in the cities and were therefore exposed to the repression. After one of its activists was allegedly forced to disclose the list of its members under torture, hundreds of its members were rounded up and most were summarily executed. With the death of the Yaris and arrest and execution of its other senior members, the organisation ceased in practice to exist.⁴⁰ Mahmudi's Revolutionary Group faced a similar fate. With its leader in exile, it joined SAMA (see below) but was unable to gain the necessary level of social and military capability required to survive in the increasingly violent and hostile climate of the country. Its organisational weakness condemned it.⁴¹

4.1 The Bala Hissar Insurrection and Its Aftermath

Broadly speaking, the Maoists strongly opposed and denounced the PDPA coup and the subsequent Soviet invasion. Their opposition ranged from distributing leaflets in the cities to armed actions against the regime in various parts of the country. One of the most famous of the Maoists' armed actions against the PDPA regime took place in the summer of 1978. It is popularly known as the Bala Hissar Insurrection, after an ancient fortress on a hill overlooking Kabul's old city turned into a military garrison. This insurrection was orchestrated by *Jabha-ye*

Mubarezin-e Mujahedin-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan Mujahedin Freedom-Fighters' Front, or JaMMA), a loose front of anti-Soviet organisations that included the Maoist Revolutionary Group but also the Islamist organisations, *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami Afghanistan* (Revolutionary Islamic Movement of Afghanistan), *Sazman-e Al-Jihad* (Al-Jihad Organisation), *Jamiat-e Def'a' az Islam* (Society for Defence of Islam) and *Jabha-ye Nejat-e Melli* (National Salvation Front).⁴²

Participants confirm that a carefully crafted military plan by JaMMA members was discovered by – or betrayed to – AGSA, the state intelligence agency, just a day before the insurrection was to take place in August 1979. Unable to alert its members on so short notice, the organisers failed to prevent the soldiers and officers of the Bala Hissar Garrison from going into action. The response from the PDPA government was swift and harsh. When the rebel troops moved out of Bala Hissar, they were received by heavy fire from pro-government units that had taken up positions immediately outside the garrison. After some hours of fierce fighting, the rebels were overwhelmed. Khaled and Gul Ahmad, key organisers of the uprising, along with many other members of the participating organisations were killed during the day.⁴³

For the Maoist activists, the insurrection and the following widespread arrests and disappearances of their cadres by the PDPA demonstrated that the country's cities and town were no longer favourable for the continuation of their struggle. Facing widespread persecution in the cities, they were forced to move into the villages. But when various groups of the movement attempted to establish fronts against the PDPA government and the Soviets, the urban and intellectual character of the

³⁹ On the repression and disappearances within this period see Afghanistan Justice Project, 'Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity 1978-2001', *Afghanistan Justice Project*, 2005, 12-19.

⁴⁰ Author's interview with a former Afghan Maoist, Kabul, July 2008.

⁴¹ Author's interview with former SAMA members, Kabul, January 2010.

⁴² Harakat was led by Mawlawi Nabi Muhammadi, a traditional religious *alem* from Logar, Nejat by Professor Sebghatullah Mojaddedi, from a historically leading Kabul religious family. Both organisations were among the seven that were later exclusively supported by Pakistan.

⁴³ 'Historical Overview of the Marxist Revolutionary Movement' [see FN 30]; author's interview with former Maoists, Kabul, December 2009; Thomas Ruttig, interview with one of the uprising's organisers, Kabul, 2008.

movement limited its chances of gaining solid footholds in the countryside. While the Maoists contributed to the social outrage against the PDPA policies by distributing night letters in many parts of the country, the villages were not very receptive for their activities and their Chinese-style peasantry mobilisation.

In the process of establishing their rural bases, the Maoist had to face – and sometimes viciously defend against – conservative mullahs and radical Islamist militant fronts.⁴⁴ As a result, they started to disguise their ideological orientation and operate under a whole range of different fronts and titles. Some maintained a loose affiliation with country-wide leftist organisations like SAMA and *Reha'i*, while others operated totally independently. In Herat and Farah provinces in western Afghanistan, military fronts established by these groups became known as 'teachers committees' or 'fronts'. In other places, like Ghazni province, they called themselves 'engineers' or 'doctors' committees'. Fronts were also formed in Laghman and Kunar and Dara-ye Nur and Shiwa districts of Nangarhar province in the east and Helmand in the south and parts of the northeast. They were generally limited in numbers, usually around a few hundred fighters and starved of weapons and other resources. As it will be shown below, the most important of these fronts formed in Parwan and Nimroz provinces.⁴⁵

The impact of the arrests and disappearances were enormous on the movement and its future direction. The leaders and key figures of SaJaM were almost entirely either eliminated or forced into exile. In their place, younger figures emerged who had to show leadership under much more adverse circumstances than those before the 1978 coup. This new leadership took over the various segments of the movement after the demise or marginalisation of the old leadership but inherited little in terms of ideological direction, organisational strength and political strategy. As the following examples of SAMA and *Reha'i*/ALO demonstrate, the movement facing extremely unfavourable circumstances during the 1980s continued to

struggle with a legacy of internal factionalism and ideological struggles.

5. SAMA

Established in 1977, SAMA (*Sazman-e Azadibakhsh-e Mardom-e Afghanistan*, or Liberation Organisation of the People of Afghanistan) emerged as one of the main politico-military organisations of Afghan Maoists in the aftermath of the April coup of 1978. During this year, *Mahfel-e Shamali*, the Mahmudis, some members of Osman's group and of other circles who had parted ways during the introspection process of 1972, once again gathered under one roof.

Organised by Majid Kalakani, a charismatic Tajik (from Kalakan in the Shamali plain north of Kabul) with excellent rhetorical skills and a solid religious education, SAMA chose to confront the new regime militarily. Before SAMA, Kalakani was leading a relatively small group known as *Mahfel-e Shamali* (Shamali Circle). Reportedly, Kalakani rejected the Three World Theory of the leadership of the post-Mao Communist Party of China, which was strongly advocated by Dr Faiz and his loyalists. Furthermore, Kalakani tended to advocate a much-looser alliance of what were called 'national democratic forces' to form a national front. In his efforts to put together such a national front, he approached many religious elements that later became senior figures of the mujahedin organisations in Pakistan.⁴⁶

This alliance showed itself to be very fragile. Key weaknesses were the underlying ideological differences and lack of a basic political and military strategy of the entire Maoist movement. The formation of a national front was declared to be a key objective of organisation, but in reality its composition and strategies proved to be contentious. This was because not all factions and figures within SAMA adhered to a Maoist ideology, or in any case they differed in their level of commitment to it as a political and military ideology. A substantial section of the organisation was made of originally non-ideological elements that came from rural notables families, some of them

⁴⁴ Author's interview with former Afghan Maoists, Kabul, July 2008 and December 2009.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Author's interview with former SAMA members, Kabul, July and December 2009.

yaghi, armed outlaws living in the mountains, hiding as the result of blood-feuds. They received a systematic political education by Kalakani himself. Another group was made up of largely educated elements that aimed to combine economic socialism and political Islamism and were influenced by Ali Shariati, a sociologist and reformist of pre-Islamic-revolution Iran. These differences were reflected in the practical strategies and tactics proposed by each group.

The actual extent to which Kalakani himself was a Maoist is not easy to establish today. Kalakani's opposition career began while he was a student in a religious college in Paghman district, Kabul province. He came from a prominent landholding family in Shamali, a region with a well-established history of rebellion against the Afghan government. Habibullah, known as Bacha-ye Saqaw (son of a water-carrier) and a native of Shamali, led a rebellion against King Amanullah Khan in 1929 and declared himself king but was killed nine months later after he lost the battle with Nader Khan. In what appears to be politically motivated, Majid's own father and grandfather were executed by the government in the early 1940s and his family were exiled to Kandahar for about eight years. Thus it is not surprising that people who knew him say that he started as a '*yaghi*' himself. In 1951, he was accused of being involved in the killing of the principal of his school in Paghman; he was arrested, jailed and later sentenced to banishment to Kandahar along with other suspects. It is not easy to ascertain when he became acquainted with Maoist ideology, but he was definitely politicised in jail where he met Dr Abdur Rahman Mahmudi. His contacts with the Maoist figures grew over time. The strongest indication of his Maoist tendencies is tactical: his use of Maoist guerrilla tactics and rural warfare strategy. A deal mediated by local elders in the Shamali plain allowed him to resume a normal life in return for abandoning his military activities shortly before the 1973 coup of Daud Khan, but it was short-lived. After the coup, the government attempted to arrest him repeatedly but failed. Kalakani was critical of the alliance between Daud and the pro-Soviet Parcham faction. Branded by the government as a bandit

and highway robber, he resumed his underground activities.⁴⁷

Ideological and tactical differences resurfaced in SAMA after it was joined by Maoist splinter groups in 1978. The more religious-leaning and less-ideological elements were proposing alliances with other mujahedin organisations – along the approach of the Bala Hessar rebellion – while the ideologically committed Maoists stressed a steadfast position against both the PDPA and the mujahedin. SAMA's *komita-ye tahqiqat-e ideolozhik* (ideological study committee) was a place where the different tendencies were most-intensely debated. Two positions polarised the debate: Hadi Mahmudi advanced a strict revolutionary view while Nader Ali Dehati, better known as Poya, a Hazara from Chintal district in northern Balkh province, supported what was usually described as a 'national democratic' strategy.⁴⁸

SAMA emerged as the most effective of the various Maoist organisations of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Kalakani and his group were known for spectacular attacks and guerrilla warfare tactics against government military installations, including urban guerrilla attacks and assassinations. In one such move, the organisation overran a military garrison in Hussain Kot, north of Kabul. Using government army uniforms, they got away with a large arms cache. The organisation's fighters attacked Soviet convoys on their way from Bagram airbase to Kabul, robbed money supplied by the Soviets to the Afghan government and, in at least one case, abducted a Soviet general.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Mir M. Seddiq Farhang, *Afghanistan dar panj qarn-e akher [Afghanistan in the Last Five Centuries]*, Vol III, Peshawar, E. Mayar Publisher, 1988, 50-1.

⁴⁸ Documents recently revealed show that during his interrogation in Kabul, Nader Ali Poya defended SAMA and stressed it was not a Maoist organisation. Razaq Mamun, an Afghan journalist, claimed to have accessed documents of interrogation of Poya and other members of SAMA at the archives of the Afghan intelligence agency. See, for instance, Razaq Mamun, *Awraq Bazjo-ye Nader Ali Poya [Papers of Interrogation of Nader Ali Poya]*, November 2009, <http://kابلpress.org>.

⁴⁹ Information provided by Thomas Ruttig, based on interviews with former SAMA activists in Kabul, 2001/02.

Kalakani's military base and the social support base he enjoyed in his home province of Parwan turned the districts where he operated into the major safe havens for Maoists fleeing widespread persecution at the hand of the PDPA government in Kabul and other provincial centres. The organisation received a deadly blow when Majid Kalakani was captured by state security agents in Kabul in March 1980 while attending a *fateha* and was executed shortly afterwards.⁵⁰ With the death of Kalakani, internal differences became more pronounced and Hadi Mahmudi, who was a candidate for leadership, withdrew from the organisation, leaving Poya as an unrivalled candidate to take over the leadership.⁵¹

By 1983, the government had succeeded in infiltrating the ranks of SAMA. Its intelligence agency had influenced a number of its second-rank leaders, who then were used to persuade its leaders to give up militancy and join the government. As this policy of infiltration and persuasion failed to gain the support of its leaders, particularly Nadir Poya, the government launched an operation to arrest the leadership. During 1983, more than 60 senior leaders were captured. Recently emerging evidence shows that Poya and other senior leaders were executed after long negotiations in the prison failed to persuade them to switch sides and support the government.⁵² This was the final blow against the SAMA leadership structure. The organisation lost its strategic direction and political leadership. Some members negotiated with various branches of the intelligence agency and many others were forced into exile in Pakistan. After that, Qayum Rahbar, a brother of Kalakani, proclaimed himself leader of the organisation, now mostly based in exile. With his killing in 1989 in Pakistan, the organisation effectively ceased to exist in the country.⁵³

⁵⁰ General M. Nabi Azimi, *Urdu wa siyasat dar Afghanistan dar seh daha-ye akhir dar Afghanistan [Army and Politics in the Last Three Decades in Afghanistan]*, Peshawar, Maiwand Publications 2000, 179-80.

⁵¹ Author's interview with former SAMA members, Kabul, July and December 2009.

⁵² Mamun, *Nader Ali Poya* [see FN 48].

⁵³ Author's interview with former SAMA members, Kabul, January 2010.

6. SAZMAN-E REHA'I

Founded in 1972 as *Grup-e Enqelabi-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan* (Revolutionary Group of the People of Afghanistan) by Dr Faiz Ahmad, this organisation survived longer than most other splinter groups of the Maoist movement. In 1980, it renamed itself *Sazman-e Reha'i Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Liberation Organisation, usually referred to as *Reha'i*). It clandestinely published a newspaper, *Mash'al-e Reha'i* (Liberation Flame), in which it presented a new identity, political manifesto and programme to fight a war of liberation against the Soviet-backed government of Kabul.⁵⁴

Reha'i was probably the most ideological of the splinter groups that remained active well into the 1980s. It also included the most fervent critics of the older generation of SaJaM leaders, who were known as *enteqadiyun* or criticsers. In its early years, it refused to recognise leaders of SaJaM as the founding organisers of the movement, but during the 1980s, through a process of self-criticism and evaluation, the organisation began to identify with the experiences of the older leaders of the movement. A major goal of *Reha'i* was to organise and train a rural revolutionary peasantry, an area in which they believed SaJaM had failed miserably. Following his graduation from the Kabul Medical University, Dr Faiz spent several months in Panjshir as part of his ideological commitment to revolutionise the countryside. He cultivated a relatively significant support base in the valley, which however was quickly overwhelmed in 1981 by Ahmad Shah Massud's forces, a leading commander of Jamiat-e Islami, who either killed or forced hundreds of Maoists and other leftists to leave the region.⁵⁵

In order to expand to the countryside, *Reha'i* adopted these principles:

1. scientific approach towards religion, which meant religion was a persistent reality of the society and required a more pragmatic approach;

⁵⁴ For more, see the homepage of the ALO, at <http://www.maoism.ru/alo/>.

⁵⁵ Author's interview with a former ALO member, Kabul, July 2009.

2. tribal and ethnic considerations, which meant that every member would be designated to work in their own communities and through local notables and influential figures;
3. geographical considerations, which meant that every member would be assigned to work in their own native regions.

Reha'i was not immune from fragmentation and factionalism. Like all other groups and organisations it faced internal splits and ideological disagreements. The first split took place in 1975 when a number of members parted ways and announced the formation of the *Komita-ye tadaruk-e Hezb-e komunist-e Afghanistan* (Committee for the Formation of the Communist Party of Afghanistan), which mostly included members who opposed the rural mobilisation strategy, which they argued would result into the loss of concentration and organisation among the existing members in the urban centres. It became known as *Akhgar* ('Spark') after its namesake publication. Dr Abdur Rauf, who led this group, was a Shiite from Kandahar and inclined towards the Albanian Labour Party's ideological current. He stressed the need for more ideological elaboration and intellectual activities as a precondition for establishing a genuine Marxist party. His group also argued that *Reha'i's* war against the Soviet-backed government of Kabul was counter-productive as it indirectly aided the Islamists, whom *Akhgar* considered to be the real enemy.⁵⁶

The *Anjoman-e Enqelab-e Zanan-e Afghanistan* (Revolutionary Association of Afghan Women, often known as RAWA) was founded as *Reha'i's* women wing, led by Mina Keshwar Kamal, the spouse of Dr Faiz Ahmed. Mainly led by Pashtuns, both RAWA and *Reha'i* moved their leadership to Pakistan during the years of war. Over time, RAWA slowly transformed into a radical feminist organisation, establishing relationship with feminist organisations in the USA and other Western countries.⁵⁷

By 1984, *Reha'i* had split again into two factions: one was led by Dr Faiz and Mina Kamal and the other was led by Amin Maiwand. During the same year, a number of people were purged from the mainstream organisation. Some notable figures including Akbar Qasimi, Abdul Sabur Hashimi, Muhammad Naim and Muhammad Qasim were allegedly assassinated at the instruction of *Reha'i's* leadership. It is claimed that these individuals were advocating a more pro-Western and liberal strategy, bringing them into conflict with the more senior leaders. External challenges and the question of whether to align more closely with the Soviet-backed government of Kabul or the mujahedin were the burning internal issues. These internal skirmishes lasted until November 1986, when Dr Faiz Ahmed and six other senior members of his organisation were allegedly abducted and killed by members of *Hezb-e Islami* in Peshawar city of Pakistan. In the following year, Mina was also assassinated in the Quetta city of Pakistan. This was followed by the takeover of the organisation by the rival faction. Amin Maiwand became the leader and Farida Ahmadi, one of his close associates, took over the leadership of RAWA, a move that led to allegations of collaboration between Amin's group and *Hezb-e Islami* in the killings.⁵⁸

7. THE STRATEGY OF SURVIVAL AND INFILTRATION

As indicated earlier, some of the Maoist organisations were able to leave their marks on the war of resistance against the Soviet-backed government in its early years. But as the war intensified during the early 1980s, room for Maoist activities grew increasingly limited. Operating under the name SaJaM or its various off-shoots was becoming impossible and even suicidal. At this stage, for many activists of the movement survival was becoming the major issue. In many situations this was possible only if they could operate under more-religious and less-secular flags.

⁵⁶ Author's interview with a former Maoist activist, Kabul, 7 July 2009.

⁵⁷ See also the biography of Meena at the website of RAWA: <http://www.rawa.org/meena.html>.

⁵⁸ Author's interview with former ALO members, Kabul, July 2009. See also the 'Historical Overview of the Marxist Revolutionary Movement' [see FN 30].

This created a dilemma for the leaders of the movement, who were unable to find reliable sources of funding and equipment outside the country and were finding it nearly impossible to occupy and hold grounds inside the country in the face of hostile and well-armed mujahedin and Afghan government troops.

One answer to this situation was downplaying or concealing their ideological orientation. Some leaders chose to slowly infiltrate mujahedin organisations considered less radical and characterised by a loose political and military structure, such as *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami*, *Mahaz-e Melli Islami*, *Nejat-e Melli*, *Shura-ye Ettefaq* (the first indigenous organisation in Hazarajat) and *Ettehadia-ye Islami-e Mujahedin Afghanistan* (Islamic Association of the Mujahedin of Afghanistan). Others attempted to establish joint fronts with local Islamist fronts.

The *Shura-ye Janbazan-e Enqelab-e Islam-e Afghanistan* (Council of Devotees of the Islamic Revolution of Afghanistan) illustrates the first pattern of infiltrating mujahedin organisations. It was formed by members of the educated class and local notables in 1979, following the well-known 24 Hut (15 March 1979) uprising in Herat. SAMA and *Reha'i* took part in the uprising along with other nationalist and traditionalist figures that were united by their shared disaffection and hostility towards the PDPA regime.⁵⁹ Led by Moalem Sayed Aqa, a graduate of a teacher training institute who sympathised with Maoist ideology, the Council strongly opposed the Soviet occupation. It published the *Hut-e Khunin* newspaper. In a stated attempt to form a national front, it joined hands with the leaders of SAMA in 1979. Similar to SAMA, it engaged in guerrilla warfare tactics against government forces in Herat province.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ According to one account, Ismail Khan, an officer of the 17th Military Division in Herat and a participant of the mutiny within the division during the uprising, initially sympathized with or was even aligned to SAMA. Later he became the dominant figure among the mujahedin in the region. Antonio Giustozzi, 'Genesis of a Prince: The Rise of Ismail Khan in Western Afghanistan 1979–1992', Working Paper No. 4, *Crisis States Research Centre*, London, 2006, 2.

⁶⁰ Yaqub Mashaof, 'Saire harakat-e roshanfekri dar Afghanistan, dawra-ye rezesh wa khezhesh 1978-1992 [The Evolution of Intellectual Movement in

But in the absence of a foreign source of support, the organisation was unable to survive independently. It used personal contacts to develop arrangements with *Harakat-e Enqelab* in the province and establish a common front. The joint venture did not last very long as Sher Aqa Chungar, a key commander of *Harakat-e Enqelab* in the province, switched his allegiance to the government. Once on the government side, he turned against the Council's members. In February 1980, he attacked the Council, killing Sayed Aqa and other key members. Following the incident, the organisation disintegrated and its surviving members left the country.⁶¹

The role of Maoists in the Hazarajat region offers an interesting example of the second pattern, of establishing joint fronts with local Islamist fronts. The viability of this approach was supported by the fact that most initial uprisings against the PDPA after the coup were spontaneous in character, reactions against the heavy-handedness of party agents. They lacked strategic direction and organisational leadership. Local notables, landlords and traditional religious figures were often instrumental in these rural mobilisations against the regime. Under these circumstances, all anti-PDPA (and later, anti-Soviet) forces could participate in joint local attacks, against district and provincial administrative centres, and share power following the government's withdrawal. However, this sort of cooperation was often short-lived, as Islamist forces were quick to turn against their more-secular and leftist allies.

Hazarajat was home to a number of senior figures in the Maoist movement, and many Hazaras had joined SaJaM before the war broke out. Local Maoist activists played an important role in instigating and mobilising the first uprisings against the PDPA government and party structures in many districts of the region. Because of its small support base and the rugged geography of the region, the government collapsed quickly in the face of

Afghanistan: Period of Rise and Fragmentation 1978-1992], www.paymandaily.com, accessed in July 2009.

⁶¹ Ibid; also Antonio Giustozzi, 'The Missing Ingredient: Non-ideological Insurgency and State Collapse in Western Afghanistan, 1979-1992', Working Paper No. 11, *Crisis States Research Centre*, London, 2007, 8-9.

popular revolts that engulfed the region throughout 1979. In September that year, a grand assembly of rebellion leaders from all over the region gathered in Waras district of Bamian and announced the formation of *Shura-ye Enqelabi-ye Ettefaq-e Islami* Afghanistan (Revolutionary Council for the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan), which sought to administer the region and represent all socio-political forces in its areas. The meeting itself included people of all ideological stripes, including participants who espoused or sympathised with Maoist tendencies. Led by Sayed Ali Beheshti, a traditional religious figure from the same district, and dominated by local khans who were mostly secular in their political outlook, the *Shura* was not very hostile towards the leftists in its early days. Its central committee was designed to include one intellectual from each district to represent the educated class.⁶²

However, these arrangements proved to be only temporary. As leftists and religious tendencies created rifts within the organisation, more-radical Islamist organisations influenced by the revolutionary Islamic Republic of Iran began to arrive during the following year: in Iran at that time, the Khomeinists similarly cracked down on their erstwhile leftist allies. Internal rivalries and competition for power exposed the real ideologies held by leftists and Islamist elements. The *Shura* was challenged internally by pro-Iranian revolutionary clerics who undermined the strategy and support base of the traditional clerics and the secular khans. Maoists were the first casualties of this intense competition that quickly became extremely violent.⁶³

As the khans and traditional clerics were weakened by the Khomeinist wave, the Maoists, being unable to act independently, sought to infiltrate the *Ettehadia-ye Islami-ye Mujahedin Afghanistan* (Islamic Association of the Mujahedin of Afghanistan), an anti-Soviet organisation established in Quetta (Pakistan). It included a combination of anti-PDPA figures and diaspora Hazara based in Pakistan and other countries. It was hosted and backed by the *Tanzim-e Nasl-e Naw-e Hazara Moghul*, an organisation of Hazaras in Quetta. Both

Ettehadia and *Tanzim* shared a broad and simple Hazara nationalist ideology, emphasising the common origin and history of all Hazaras, their centuries-old persecution and loss of historical Hazara lands within Afghanistan at the hand of Pashtun rulers. Fleeing persecution at the hands of Islamists in the Hazarajat, Hazara Maoists began to infiltrate the ranks of *Ettehadia* as writers, journalists and office administrators. Denounced broadly as *Shola'is*, these individuals became a source of tension between *Ettehadia* and the *Shura*. Although the two organisations were seeking to act as close allies, the former soon started being accused of being dominated by non-Islamic individuals. Previously, the *Ettehadia* was a main source of foreign supplies of weapons for the latter. Henceforth, exchange of accusations and counter-accusations of infiltrations by the *Shola'is* became routine among Hazara anti-Soviet organisations. Towards the end of 1980, amid a climate of distrust, the rising Khomeinist component of the Hazara *ulema* started a propaganda campaign against real and perceived Maoists. *Ettehadia* became the main target and its bases and key figures came under attack across the region, forcing the organisation to almost completely retreat into Pakistan.⁶⁴

In Afghanistan's southwest, the Nimruz Front stood out as an exception in its ability to hold an independent territory throughout the period of jihad and the civil war. The Maoists enjoyed a comparatively strong support base in this southwestern province. They outnumbered both the PDPA and the Islamists amongst the educated class in the region. Following the dissolution of SaJaM, Maoist activist Nabi Akhgar announced the formation of *Goruh-e Enqelabi Jawed* (Eternal Revolutionary Group). Akhgar was among those arrested and likely executed in Kabul soon after the PDPA came to power. What followed was a power struggle between Ghazi Parwez, a Persian-speaking Shiite from the Chakhansur area, and Gul Muhammad, a Ghilzai Pashtun from Charburjak, both in Nimruz. The struggle eventually resulted into a polarisation of the front along ethnic and linguistic lines. Gul Muhammad was at the same time a member of the Central Committee of SAMA and proposed the integration of the

⁶² See Ibrahim, *The Failure of a Clerical Proto-State* [see FN 25].

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Nimroz Front in it, which was opposed by Parwez. In February 1982, the rivalry erupted into an armed confrontation between the two sides in which Gul Muhammad was supported by Maoists from Farah and Haji Muhammad Shah, a fellow Pashtun and a commander of *Harakat-e Enqelab*. Parwez enlisted the support of Baluchis and Persian-speaking Shiites, including members of *Hezbollah*, a Shiite mujahedin organisation in the western region. Parwez was eventually killed in an attack by the Achekzai supporters of *Harakat-e Enqelab* and Gul Muhammad was apparently assassinated en route to the town of Taftan, bordering Iran in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. Despite the elimination of the two contending figures, the division along ethnic lines remained. Hence, Pashto-speaking Maoists joined *Reha'i*, while the Nimruz Front under the leadership of Karim Brahwi and Ghulam Dastegir Azad became a SAMA stronghold. It acquired a particularly important significance for SAMA after it lost its base in Shamali in 1983.⁶⁵

The Nimruz Front survived all the upheavals of the 1980s and 1990s as an independent front in the province, but over time it lost its ideological tendencies or learned to conceal them. Although it offered a safe environment for Maoists fleeing persecution in other parts of the country, and dozens of SAMA activists joined it after they lost their territories in Parwan and other provinces, like SAMA itself the Front was never a purely ideological organisation and included moderate and Islam-oriented mujahedin in its ranks. Perhaps, a sense of political pragmatism deriving from the widespread hostility towards Maoist tendencies combined with weak and declining ideological fervour and geographic factors (the area controlled was on the border with Iran and easily defensible) can explain its survival as an independent base.⁶⁶

Of the three main ideological currents originating in the 1960s, the years of war and conflict have taken its greatest toll on the Maoists. The recent mushrooming of political

parties since 2001 shows that fragmentation and factionalism is not a unique characteristic of the Maoists anymore. Dozens of political parties of various sizes have been formed by groups formerly affiliated to PDPA, Islamist or Maoist organisations. In fact, ideology has lost its importance as a reason for mobilisation and political competition; formerly revolutionary groups and individuals now appear to recognise the importance of political struggles in pluralistic environments. The need for building effective coalitions or merging smaller groups into bigger parties is generally recognised to be critical to the future of political stability in the country, but real success has been difficult to achieve in a political and institutional environment that is not particularly favourable to political parties.

A significant number of former Maoist groups and individuals have participated in the post-Taleban political process in a number of ways. Some have occupied ministerial and other positions in the Afghan government while others formed new parties with the hope of a participating in the new democratic experiment. Smaller groups mainly led by diaspora activists continue to maintain a strong ideological outlook, seeing the post-Taleban Afghanistan as under imperialist occupation. However, most of them have transformed ideologically and are generally inspired by pragmatism rather than ideological dictates.⁶⁷

8. CONCLUSION

Since its emergence, the Maoist movement of Afghanistan has been beset by numerous challenges, foremost among which were endless internal ideological struggles, a concomitant organisational confusion and, last but not the least, a lack of significant foreign assistance in its struggle against much more powerful and resourceful organisations. The history of Afghan Maoism highlights the importance of the organisational dimension in the development of

⁶⁵ Author's interview with a former Maoist, Kabul, July 2008; and Dawlatabadi, *Introduction to Political Parties* [see FN 19], 147-49.

⁶⁶ Authors interview with former members of SAMA, Kabul, December 2009.

⁶⁷ For a general discussion of political parties in recent years, see 'Political Parties in Afghanistan', *International Crisis Group*, June 2005; and Thomas Ruttig, 'Islamists, Leftists – and a Void in the Center: Afghanistan's Political Parties and Where They Came From, 1902-2006', *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*, Kabul, 2006.

political movements: in theory, the idea of relying on a peasant base in a country which was 90 per cent rural in the 1970s made full sense and could have given the Maoists an edge over its rivals. But they could not put their ideas into practice.

Despite a strong beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, and again in the first years after the 7 Saur coup, the Afghan Maoist intellectuals did not fare well in the ensuing years. Marred by incessant internal ideological struggles and lack of external support, the movement lost much of its momentum before the war broke out in 1978. The actual efforts to instigate a Chinese-style socialist revolution and to surround the cities with a revolutionary peasantry proved a formidable task – and more so after the Soviet military intervention. Similarly, how to organise a communist party, a people's army and a national front as weapons of the revolution remained contentious, and the discussion over whether or not the time was ripe for announcing the formation of a party became a key source of fragmentation and factionalism. The pace of political and social development during this period of the country's history was so fast that these kinds of intellectual debates and disagreements did not get the chance they needed to produce long-term outcomes.

In the struggle between the Islamists and pro-Soviet leftists that dominated Afghan politics in 1970s and 1980s, the Afghan Maoists joined the resistance but were sandwiched between more powerful and resourceful political and military forces. Most of the prominent Afghan Maoists were either eliminated in the early years after the PDPA coup or were forced into exile, leaving the fate of the movement in the hands of younger and adventurous figures like Kalakani and Dr Faiz. These figures inherited internal ideological differences and unresolved questions of strategy and tactics as they attempted to put their ideas into practice and claim footholds in an increasingly competitive and hostile rural environment. Weak organisationally, the movement could not rely on charisma either. Since its beginning, an extreme emphasis on underground subversive activities prevented the movement from producing visible and appealing figures that could offer a more-unifying leadership.

In sum, the history of Maoism in Afghanistan is one of fragmentation and factionalism, as is the case with most other political movements in Afghanistan – but also of desperate struggle and sacrifices. Maoism was espoused as an ideology for radical changes by a significant number of Afghan intellectuals and student activists in a period of Afghan history during which the first, hesitant steps towards democratisation were taken. Persecution, violence, civil war and foreign intervention prevented all political groups from consolidating. In the case of the Maoists, ideological rifts contributed. As a result of the end of the Cold War and China's march towards capitalism (or a socialist market economy) made the Maoist ideology out-dated in the eyes of many of its former followers. Some of those Afghan Maoists, who had survived the wars, emerged from the underground to participate in the post-2001 democratisation; others remained reluctant to do so. Some of the Maoists – in a protracted political process – shed central Maoist ideas – like the revolutionary way to power, the peasants' revolution and the protracted people's war – and adopted democratic principles instead. But, like other pro-democratic groups, they were marginalised in post-2001 Afghanistan and remain at the fringes of the political system.

9. GLOSSARY

9.1 Afghan Maoist Organisations

Akhgar. Spark

Anjoman-e Enqelab-e Zanan-e Afghanistan. Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)

Darafsh-e Sorkh. Red Banner a publication of the *Sazman-e Enqelabi Iran* (Revolutionary Organisation of Iran)

Enteqadeyun. Criticisers

Ettehadia-ye Islami-e Mujahedin Afghanistan. Islamic Association of the Mujahedin of Afghanistan

Goruh-e Enqelab-e Jawed. Eternal Revolutionary Group

Goruh-e Enqelab-e Mardom-e Afghanistan. Revolutionary Group of the People of Afghanistan

Jabha-ye Mobarezin-e Mujahed-e Afghanistan. Afghan Mujahedin Freedom-Fighters' Front

Komita-ye tadaruk-e Hezb-e komunist Afghanistan. Committee for the Formation of the Communist Party of Afghanistan

Pasmanzar-e tarikhi. Historical background

Sazman-e Al-Jihad. Al-Jihad Organisation

Sazman-e Azadibakhsh-e Mardom-e Afghanistan Afghanistan (SAMA). Afghanistan People's Liberation Organisation

Sazman-e Enqelab-e Watanparastan-e Waq'e'i (SIWW). Revolutionary Organisation of the Real Patriots

Sazman-e Jawanan-e Mutaraqi (SajaM). Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO)

Sazman-e Razmandegan-e Khalq-e Afghanistan (SRKHA). Organisation of Fighters of the People of Afghanistan

Sazman-e Reha'i Afghanistan. Afghanistan Liberation Organisation, known as Reha'i

Sazman-e Reha'i-bakhsh-e Khalq-e Afghanistan (SRKHA). Organisation for Liberation of the People of Afghanistan

Shola-ye Jawed. Eternal Flame, the first newspaper publication of the SajaM party

Shura-ye Janbazan-e Enqelab-e Islam-e Afghanistan. Council of Devotees of the Islamic Revolution of Afghanistan

9.2 Other Organisations and Institutions

Harakat-e Enqelab Islamic Afghanistan. Revolutionary Islamic Movement of Afghanistan

Hezb-e Dimokratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan. People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA)

Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan. Islamic Party of Afghanistan

Hezbollah. Party of God

Jabha-ye Nejat-e Islami. Islamic Salvation Front

Jamiat-e Defa az Islam. Society for Defence of Islam

Jawanan-e Musalman. Muslim Youth

Khadamat-e Amniat-e Dawlati (KhAD). Afghanistan's state security service

Khalq. People, masses

Mahaz-e Melli Islami Afghanistan. National Islamic Front of Afghanistan

Mazdoor Kisan. Party (Workers and Peasants Party) of Pakistan

Parcham. Flag

Shura-ye Enqelab-e Ettefaq-e Islami Afghanistan. Revolutionary Council for the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan

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