Aiding Afghanistan

The Background and Prospects for Reconstruction in a Fragmented Society

Asger Christensen
Aiding Afghanistan
The Background and Prospects for Reconstruction in a Fragmented Society
by Asger Christensen

Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
NIAS Reports, No. 26

by NIAS Publishing
Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS)
Leifsgade 33, 2300 Copenhagen S, Denmark
Tel: (+45) 3254 8844 • Fax: (+45) 3296 2530 • e-mail: sec@nias.ku.dk

ISBN 87-87062-44-5
ISSN 1398-313x

© Asger Christensen 1995

All rights reserved

About the Author

Asger Christensen is a Danish anthropologist who has worked with reconstruction projects in Afghanistan for several years. This paper is based on a report prepared for the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) on behalf of NIAS.
Table of Contents

Preface  8

Introduction  9

1. Historical Developments  11
   The Kingdom of Kabul  11
   The birth of modern Afghanistan  14
   A failed attempt at modernisation  17
   Consolidation of the monarchy  21
   New international alignments  22
   The emergence of the left  23
   Two coups d’état  24

2. Development and Disruption  28
   Afghan agriculture before the war  28
   Three decades of development  32
   Dependent development  35
   Material destruction and economic disruption  36

3. The Social and Cultural Context of Resistance and Civil War  45
   Socio-cultural diversity  45
   Organisational continuities  51
   Traditional authority in Islam  53
   The Islamic resistance  56
   Local political leadership: khan and qommandan  62
   The Taliban: change and continuity  68

4. The Political Economy of War  72
   The fragmentation of Afghanistan  72
   Looting and smuggling  81
   Drug production  84
   International linkages  87
5. **Legal Conditions and Human Rights** 92
   - The Afghan legal system 92
   - Human rights violations after the 1978 coup 96
   - Human rights violations during the Soviet occupation 97
   - Human rights violations after the Soviet withdrawal 98
   - Human rights violations by the resistance 99
   - The situation after the mujaheddin takeover 100
   - Judicial fragmentation and introduction of *Sharia* law 101

6. **Refugee Relief and Repatriation** 105
   - The exodus 105
   - Refugees in Pakistan 107
   - Refugees in Iran 110
   - Refugee return 111
   - Repatriation or local settlement 117
   - The new refugees from Kabul 122
   - An uncertain future 124

7. **From Solidarity and Relief to Rehabilitation and Development** 126
   - NGOs and refugee relief 126
   - The war and solidarity organisations 127
   - Enter the United States 129
   - Enter the United Nations 130
   - Afghan NGOs 133
   - From solidarity assistance to rehabilitation and development 136
   - Sustainability 141
   - Attempts at coordination 144
   - Commanders and *shura* 146
   - Prospects for assistance 150

8. **Summary and Conclusions** 152
   - Reconstruction and international assistance 153
   - Repatriation 156
   - Three scenarios 157
   - Continued political fragmentation 158
   - The war spreads 159
   - Political compromise 160
   - Continued dependency 161

Sources 163
List of Maps

1. General map of Afghanistan 6
2. Provinces of Afghanistan 7
3. Major ethnic divisions of Afghanistan 45
4. Refugee origins 107

List of Figures

The legacy of war, Surkhrud in Nangarhar, May 1992  cover
1. De-mining in Khost, Paktia, November 1991 37
2. Hazara Mujaheddin, Qarabagh in Ghazni, August 1991 48
4. Khost bazaar after the looting, May 1991 82
5. Timber smuggling, Shigal in Kunar, August 1993 83
6. Refugees returning home, Khost in Paktia, June 1992 112
7. Returning refugees, Khost in Paktia, June 1992 113
8. Repair of an irrigation canal, Khost in Paktia, December 1991 132
9. Distribution of improved wheat seed and fertilizer, Narang in Kunar, October 1990 133
10. Teaching goes on while the school is being rebuilt, Chaprahar in Nangarhar, August 1993 140

(all photographs by the author)
Map 1: General map of Afghanistan

Source: L. Dupree: 'Afghanistan'.
Map 2: Provinces of Afghanistan
Preface

This study is prepared by Mag. Scient. Asger Christensen at the Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, University of Copenhagen for the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).

A variety of sources have been used to compile the study. In addition to published material comprising books, articles and reports, the study also draws on interviews with Afghans as well as with UN and NGO staff during visits to Peshawar in October 1994 and April 1995. The author has undertaken anthropological fieldwork in Afghanistan in 1977-78, and worked for four years as manager of rehabilitation projects in Afghanistan for the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR) between 1988 and 1993. The author would like to thank Nancy Dupree and Sven Johansson for comments on an earlier draft of the report.
Introduction

The more than sixteen years of war following the Communist coup d’etat in April 1978 have virtually devastated Afghanistan. More than a million people have been killed, hundreds of thousands are disabled or maimed, and the conflict has produced one of the largest refugee populations in the world. The extent of material destruction is staggering. Even before the war Afghanistan was one of the world’s poorest countries, and the development which had been achieved in the decades before the conflict began has been obliterated. Afghanistan now ranks as the 171st country in the Human Development Index out of the 173 countries listed in UNDP’s ‘Human Development Report’ for 1993.

The focus of this report is on processes and patterns rather than on political and military events. A number of inter-linked issues have influenced Afghanistan’s past and continue to play an important role in the present situation. Central among these is the persistent difficulty of the Afghan state to generate the revenue required both to maintain internal order and undertake development activities. Whatever political setup that eventually emerges out of the present conflict, it will also be confronted by this problem, as will the international agencies assisting Afghanistan’s reconstruction.

Closely related to this issue is that of the cultural categories and social dynamics that have formed the evolving context for both the relations between state and society before the war and for the resistance struggle and civil war. The relative weakness of the Afghan state and the corresponding autonomy of its rural population has had a crucial influence on Afghanistan’s history even in modern times. As a result of the war, the central government and the state apparatus have collapsed. Afghanistan is today a stateless society split into different political entities, of which some control fairly large territories while others are restricted to a village or a valley. This situation influences the scope for international assistance and is in turn influenced by this assistance.
Another important issue is the future of the Afghan refugees. While a massive repatriation took place during 1992, the fighting between rival coalitions of former resistance parties for control of Kabul has drastically reduced the return of the refugees. Whether those that remain will eventually return if conditions in Afghanistan permit them to do so is uncertain, and has been the subject of controversy between the UN and Pakistan. At the same time the conflict in Kabul has created a new emergency situation which has not received much international attention.

The present report begins with an examination of the historical background of the conflict in Afghanistan and its pre-war economy and development. After this comes an analysis of the social and cultural context of the resistance and civil war, and of the consequences of the war on the Afghan economy and society. This is followed by an examination of the international assistance for both the refugees and the rehabilitation of Afghanistan in terms of the impact this assistance has had, the problems it faces and the local context in which it takes place. Finally, the three most likely future scenarios and the scope they provide for continued assistance to Afghanistan are discussed.

The description of developments in Afghanistan covers events up to the end of April 1995.
Historical Developments

The Kingdom of Kabul

Afghanistan as the country we know today, or rather as it looked in 1978 on the eve of the war, only dates back around a hundred years. It was not before the last decades of the nineteenth century that Afghanistan emerged as a territorial entity within fixed borders and developed a state apparatus capable of exercising some measure of control over the people living within these borders.¹

Until this period, the basic political organisation existing in the area resembled what the medieval Arab historian Ibn Khaldun has described for North Africa in the 14th century (Ibn Khaldoun 1967:128-32, 152). The same opposition between the area under government control, bled el-mahhzen, and bled es-siba, ‘the land of insolence’ (Coon 1958:163) outside the realm of government was also characteristic of the area corresponding to present day Afghanistan. Here the area dominated by the government, the daulat, was contrasted with yaghistan, which has been translated as ‘the land of the unruly’ in the autobiography of the founder of the modern Afghan state, Amir Abdur Rahman (vol. II, 1900:157). In this form of political organisation, the state personified by a ruling dynasty exercised control over one or more cities or towns, which served as garrisons and centres for administration, learning, and trade. Beyond these, the authority of the state corresponded to the extent of the fluctuating area where it was capable of levying taxes. Between this centre and those of neighbouring states existed a political periphery comprising communities organised on the basis of different configurations of kinship and patronage, which were capable of maintaining varying degrees of independence vis-a-vis the states. However, despite this political opposition between centre and periphery, the two realms were not totally separate. Trade often

¹) With an area around 650,000 sq.km, Afghanistan is the size of France plus Denmark and Switzerland.
created relations between them, and both were part of a larger complex cultural and moral community constituted by Islam.

When therefore Mountstuart Elphinstone, the first British envoy to the Afghan court, called his classical description from 1815 *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* and not ‘Afghanistan’, it is precisely this situation, where the state does not define society in territorial or organisation-al terms, which is expressed in the title. When Elphinstone visited the Kingdom of Caubul in 1809, it had existed for about sixty years. In the period prior to that, the area corresponding to present day Afghanistan had been part of the two large empires which dominated the region: Safavid Persia and Moghul India.

The weakening of these two empires created a political environment, which enabled Ahmad Shah, an Afghan tribal leader, who had been a mercenary in the employ of the Persian king, to establish himself as the head of a confederation of the Abdali tribe, which later came to be known as the Durrani. Ahmad Shah led this confederation, which included other Pashtun tribal groups as well, in the conquest of areas in what today is Afghanistan, Pakistan and North India. The confederation choose Ahmad Shah as king in 1747 at a *loya jirga* (great council) held near Kandahar. The state over which he presided was geared towards the administration of conquered lands and the division of the spoils deriving from this, rather than the governing of the tribal confederation itself. Thus, its main income did not stem from taxation of the Pashtun areas, since many tribes did not pay any land tax at all, but from those conquered in India (Gankovsky, 1981:90-91).

The Afghan tribal empire founded by Ahmad Shah dissolved within a generation following his death in 1772. As argued by Rubin (1988:1192), despite its brief existence this empire nevertheless shared many of the central features of the modern Afghan state including some of its persistent problems. It was based on the political domination by the Pashtun over all other ethnic groups, and it was headed by a Durrani ruler. It suffered from intense agnatic rivalry among claimants to the throne, and from permanent opposition whether overt or covert from most of the rural population (including the Pashtuns) to attempts by the state to increase its influence. Finally, it never managed to establish a reliable and adequate resource base within the territory it controlled, and for that reason was

---

2) Thus, the Durrani, who held most of the land in the Kandahar region, were exempt from paying taxes in return for military service, and the Ghilzai were only moderately taxed. The Tajiks paid more revenue than the Pashtuns, and of all provinces Kashmir paid the largest amount of revenue (Kakar 1979:73).
never able to establish an independent military basis for the government. As the Kingdom of Kabul gradually lost its possessions in the Indian subcontinent during the late 18th and early 19th century, its tax base declined to less than one third of what it had been at the end of Ahmad Shah’s rule (Gankovsky 1981:86), thus significantly reducing the economic foundation of the ruler’s power.

During the 19th century the Kingdom of Kabul became the scene of a succession of bloody power struggles between rivals from the Durrani tribal elite, with periods of political consolidation followed by those of fragmentation into smaller political entities. In 1818 the ruling Saddozai clan was ousted by another Durrani clan, the Mohammadzai, who continued to rule even after the abolition of the monarchy in 1973 right up till the Communist coup d’état in 1978. Elphinstone’s visit to the Afghan court had signified the beginning of foreign imperial interest in what now came to be referred to as Afghanistan. During the remainder of the 19th century this interest increased as Czarist Russia expanded towards the South, and the British Indian empire towards the Northwest.

Twice during the 19th century the British invaded Afghanistan to counter what they perceived as Russian attempts to gain influence in the country. The first Anglo-Afghan war (1839-42) ended in defeat for the British. The immediate objective of the invasion, namely to reinstall as a client ruler Shah Shuja, who had been deposed as king more than twenty years before, was a failure. Shah Shuja was killed within a few months of the British withdrawal. Instead Dost Mohammad, the ruler who had been ousted by the British, returned to occupy the throne for another 21 years. Politically, the only outcome of the British invasion was to interrupt, delay and complicate the attempts by Dost Mohammad to extend and consolidate his rule. Although he succeeded in extending his control over most of what constitutes present day Afghanistan, his achievement did not last. At his death in 1863, Afghanistan became again the scene of a bloody civil war, and among his potential successors brothers fought brothers and sons fought fathers for supremacy.

The dominant figure during the period following the death of Dost Mohammad was his son Sher Ali, who ruled Kabul from 1863 to 1866 and again from 1869 to 1879. During his second period as ruler he began a consolidation of state power, which comprised the creation of a standing army, rationalisation of the system of taxation, expansion of the burea-
racy, and the establishment of state-controlled civil and military schools (Kakar 1979: xx). However, once again this process was disrupted by British intervention during the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-80), and the state apparatus collapsed.

As in the first Anglo-Afghan war, British troops again invaded Afghanistan to forestall what they considered threatening diplomatic manoeuvres by the Russians, who had by then penetrated deep into Central Asia. As it had happened in the first war, they encountered widespread popular resistance, but the Afghans, though opposed to the British, were at the same time divided by rivalries between different pretenders to the throne. In the end the successful claimant to the throne, Abdur Rahman, a grandson of Dost Mohammad, had to comply with the conditions which his cousin and rival Mohammad Yakub had accepted during his brief tenure as Amir in Kabul in the Treaty of Gandamak in 1879.

This treaty gave the British control over Afghanistan’s foreign policy, and certain areas in the border region between Afghanistan and India were ceded to the British. In return the Afghan Amir would receive yearly subsidies from the British (Dupree 1973:409). Thus, while Afghanistan maintained autonomy over its internal affairs, its international position was now that of a buffer state between the Russian and the British empires.

The Birth of Modern Afghanistan

When Abdur Rahman became Amir in 1880, the area under his control only comprised Kabul and its immediate surroundings, but within sixteen years he managed to extend the influence of the central government over most of Afghanistan. This was achieved through a process which Dupree has aptly called ‘internal imperialism’ (Dupree 1973:417). During his reign Abdur Rahman had to deal with forty disturbances, of which ten were major rebellions, and four of these he himself called civil wars.

Unlike the expansion undertaken by Afghan rulers in the past, Amir Abdur Rahman’s extension of state power took place within defined territorial boundaries. The demarcation of Afghanistan’s boundaries was presided over by the two imperial powers with the British acting on behalf of the Afghans in relation to the Russians. In 1893 an agreement was reached regarding the boundary between Afghanistan and British India. This boundary, the so-called Durand Line, cut right through areas inhabited by Pashtun tribes. While the areas ceded to the British had always
been part of the *yaghistan* which no Afghan ruler had really controlled, they were nevertheless considered part of the realm of Afghanistan. Despite his endorsement of the 1893 boundary agreement, Amir Abdur Rahman therefore never accepted the Durand Line as a permanent international boundary (Kakar 1971:109). This view was shared by later Afghan rulers including the Communists, and right up till today has been a key factor in the relations between Afghanistan and its eastern neighbours whether British India or Pakistan.

Apart from the dynastic struggles within the royal lineage with rival pretenders to the throne, the expansion of government authority entailed a confrontation with both the tribal and religious elites. As mentioned above, the two British invasions had seriously impaired the state apparatus, and this had provided the scope for the tribal and religious elites to assume the leadership of the resistance struggle. As a result both of these groups had strengthened their position, and just as they had opposed foreign interference, they also opposed attempts by Afghan rulers to restrict their powers. The Amir curtailed the influence of these groups by making their continued access to power and economic resources dependent on their allegiance to the central government (Ghani 1978:271). Yet, as the subsequent history of Afghanistan was to show, this reshaping of the traditional elites was only partially successful, and they still retained the potential of emerging as alternative sources of power vis-a-vis the state.

Two key elements of the centralising policies of the Amir which went hand in hand were the attempts to create a strong army and to impose taxation. The Amir did not inherit any army from his predecessors but had to develop one himself, and attempted to make it independent of tribal control (Kakar 1979:93). By the mid-1880s, the Amir had created a standing army of 50-60,000 men, who were paid wages in cash (Gregorian 1969:141). Yet, he was not able to dispense entirely with the kind of irregular units used by his predecessors. Such units were raised by tribal leaders and big landowners who were compensated with remissions of the revenue due from their landholdings (Kakar 1979:109). To equip the army with modern weapons, the first modern workshops were established in Kabul, and at the same time arms were bought outside Afghanistan or donated by the British.

---

4) Thus, the Amir deprived the *ulama* (religious dignitaries) of direct control over significant economic assets like *awqaf* lands (religious endowments), and instead redistributed the income from these as salaries to those among the *ulama* who complied with the policies of the government (Ghani:ibid).
As new regions came under the control of the Amir, the population whether Pashtun or non-Pashtun was subjected to taxation. Among the many different types of taxes which were imposed, land tax was by far the most important. Taxes were collected mostly in kind but also in cash. The collection was undertaken either by government officials or through tax farming by private contractors (ibid:85). Despite cheating by tax collectors, the state revenues grew considerably, and by 1891 the yearly revenue had increased slightly less than four times compared with the last year of the reign of Amir Sher Ali (ibid:90). It is not quite clear whether the revenue raised was sufficient to cover state expenditure, of which the military was by far the largest item. In any case, from 1883 onwards the Amir received an annual subsidy from the British, and on three occasions they provided emergency assistance consisting of money and arms (ibid).

Amir Abdur Rahman’s main achievement was the extension and consolidation of government control, whereas the economic structures were left relatively unaffected. While trade benefitted from the establishment of peace within the country, the policy of isolation against foreign influence, whether in the form of investments or communications, insulated the economy against change. It is a measure of the Amir’s success in controlling the elites of the country and consolidating the state apparatus that he himself died a natural death and that his eldest son, Habibullah, succeeded him peacefully; “... an event with no precedent, and, thus far, no sequel in the history of Afghanistan” (Rubin 1988:1195).

While relatively undramatic compared with the reign of both his predecessor and successor, the period of Amir Habibullah (1901-19) nevertheless witnessed some important developments. He granted amnesty to some of the political prisoners and exiles who had opposed his father. Among those who returned were Mahmud Tarzi. Tarzi belonged to an Afghan family exiled under Abdur Rahman, and he had been educated in Turkey where he had been influenced by the modernist, pan-Islamic and nationalist ‘Young Turks’. Together with other young intellectuals with a similar background, Tarzi became the central figure of a group known as the ‘Young Afghans’, who championed the modernisation of Afghanistan. Tarzi was adviser to the Amir during most of his rule. However, their relations became strained during the First World War, when the Amir refused to follow the nationalist and Pan-Islamic policy advocated by the ‘Young Afghans’, who wanted him to side with the Ottoman Empire and the Central Powers against Britain.

Nevertheless, the ideology of modernism did have a political impact and some reforms were undertaken. The first steps towards modern edu-
cation were taken in 1904 with the establishment of the Royal Military College and the Habibiya College, the country’s first high school. Both schools came to rely on Turkish instructors. Other measures included the relaxation of restrictions on foreign trade, the improvements of some of the roads, and the establishment of a few small-scale industries in Kabul mainly to supply the Afghan army.

The limited modernisation during the reign of Amir Habibullah was conditioned by two factors. Despite the pressure from the modernists, the Amir was not willing to undertake measures which would challenge the tribal establishment. Instead he tried to accommodate these by relaxing the system of recruitment for the army, established a Council of State to handle tribal affairs in which the interests of tribal leaders were given due consideration, and permitted tribal participation in judiciary procedures (Gregorian 1969:181). At the same time the revenue at the disposal of the Amir was simply not sufficient to undertake large-scale modernisation schemes while also paying the expenses necessary for the army and the bureaucracy (ibid: 202).

A Failed Attempt at Modernisation

Amir Habibullah was murdered by unknown assassins in early 1919. During the power struggle which followed, his youngest son Amanullah, a key figure in the ‘Young Afghan’ movement, managed to seize the throne and imprison his rival brother, Nasrullah, who was the main exponent of the traditionalist forces.

As one of his first acts after seizing power, Amanullah repudiated the 1879 Treaty of Gandamak and declared Afghanistan independent. This secured him support from both the nationalist modernisers and the anti-British traditionalists. Afghanistan’s independence was immediately recognised by the new Soviet government and by the Turks and Germans as well, but not by the British. In the brief Third Anglo-Afghan War which followed, the Afghan forces crossed the border into British India, but were soon stopped militarily. While the war was not a spectacular military success for the Afghans, it was so politically. At the Treaty of Rawalpindi in August 1919, Afghanistan was granted the right to conduct its own foreign affairs, while the British ceased their subsidy to the Amir.

Some of the first reforms undertaken by Amanullah concerned education. Apart from military training and the Habibiya high school founded by his father, what little education existed was either undertaken by mul-
lahs or Islamic judges, or by private teachers for the children of well off urban families. Three new high schools were established in Kabul and staffed with either French, German or English teachers who taught in their own language. The purpose of these schools was to prepare their students for study abroad to create the skilled administrative and professional elite the country needed if it were to modernise. Other schools were also established to train administrators and teachers, and a girls school, the Malalai, was founded in 1921. However, outside Kabul, the expansion of the educational system was confronted by problems ranging from religious opposition to lack of trained teachers and adequate school facilities.

The creation of educational opportunities for women was one of several measures by Amanullah to improve the position of women. He also introduced a Family Code in 1921, which banned child marriage and marriage between close kin and placed restrictions on the expenses associated with marriages (ibid). Some of the clauses in the code had already been introduced by Abdur Rahman and Habibullah and, while Amanullah went further than any of them, the extent to which the law had any impact in the countryside is doubtful.

The reforms required considerable expenditure. Since Amanullah like his predecessors was unwilling to open the country to foreign investments or to obtain loans from abroad, and since he received only little foreign aid during his reign, this could only take place through increased taxation. Soon after his assumption of power, Amanullah undertook a reorganisation of the system of taxation. Land revenue became largely monetarised, and tax collection was now carried out by state officials. Parallel to this, full proprietary rights were guaranteed by decree in 1923. Formerly all lands in private possession with the exception of some land in urban areas had at least in theory belonged to the state. Thus, lands given under previous rulers as grants now became recognised private property. At the same time large-scale sale of crown lands took place (Guha 1967:171).

Although far from transparent, the effects of these changes were nevertheless significant. The change from taxation in kind to cash stimulated the monetarisation of the economy. In addition, the administrative changes regarding tax collection reduced the scope for corruption and graft somewhat, and also weakened those local leaders who had formerly been involved in tax collection. At the same time, however, the privatisation of

5) The French language high school Istiqal (Independence) was established in 1922, the German language high school Najat (Liberation) in 1924, and the English language high school in 1927. The education in each school was patterned after that of the country from which it drew its principal teachers (Gregorian 1969:129-40).
land titles and the sale of crown lands enabled the local rural elites to consolidate or enlarge their landholdings, often at the expense of small farmers (ibid:172). The combination of private land titles and monetarised taxation also meant that farmers, who had to take loans to pay their taxes, could now pledge their land as security. According to Guha (ibid), the result was large-scale transfers of land titles and an increase in tenancy. This assessment of the effects of the reforms regarding taxation and land tenure is not shared by Poullada (1973:135), who states that they led to the creation of “...a class of peasant proprietors, increased agricultural production, and minimised peasant dissatisfaction”.

Although the fiscal reforms increased government revenues, it was not possible to finance the reforms without increasing the burden of taxation. In the period between 1919 and 1929, the tax on certain types of land increased fourfold, and livestock taxes were also two to five times higher (Guha 1967:175). The result was not ‘minimised peasant dissatisfaction’, but the opposite. This created a fertile ground for agitation against Amanullah by those among the tribal and religious elite who were opposed to his reforms.

Whereas his father and grandfather had given first priority to the modernisation of the army, Amanullah did not. He did, however, attempt improvements and relied heavily on Turkish military advisers and obtained modern arms from both the Soviets and the British (Poullada 1973:112-14). On the recommendation of his Turkish advisers, despite the opposition of senior Afghans in the military, Amanullah introduced a new pay scale, which reduced army pay by 75 per cent. This cut should have been offset by various fringe benefits, but these were never introduced (ibid:117). The result was widespread demoralisation throughout the army.

When the Mangal tribe near Khost in what is now the province of Paktia rose in rebellion in 1924, the weakness of the army was revealed. The rebellion was caused by a mixture of resentment against increasing government interference and agitation by mullahs opposed to laws liberalising the position of women and reducing their own role in the judicial system (ibid: 94). The rebellion lasted for nine months and was only put down with the help of tribal levies raised by local leaders loyal to Amanullah. The cost of crushing the rebellion consumed two years worth of revenue, and Amanullah also had to revoke and modify some of the laws opposed by the rebels (Gregorian 1969:255).

6) Both Guha (1967:173) and Gregorian (1969:270) argues that there was growing peasant dissatisfaction as a result of increasing taxation.
In December 1927, Amanullah, his queen and senior government members left on a tour which lasted till July 1928 and took them through a number of European and Middle Eastern countries. He returned impressed with what he had seen both in Europe and in Turkey and Persia, where Kemal Ataturk and Reza Shah were undertaking policies of modernisation which the Amir wished to emulate. In August Amanullah convened a Loya Jirga of some one thousand notables and informed them about his plans for further reforms. Among these were constitutional changes which would lead to the establishment of a representative government. Other reforms included abolition of hereditary titles and administrative measures to reduce corruption. This was accepted by the Loya Jirga but it rejected proposals to introduce compulsory education for girls (as well as for boys) and age limits on marriages. In addition to these reforms, Amanullah issued three decrees which, considering the opposition he was already facing disclosed a surprising lack of political sensitivity. All Afghans visiting or residing in Kabul were to wear western dress, women were free to discard the veil, and polygamy was outlawed among government officials.

The backing which Amanullah had achieved during the Third Anglo-Afghan War from the traditionalists and the religious establishment had long since vanished. Their increasingly vocal opposition focused on those issues which were seen as a threat to Islam and relations within the family, and they found an increasingly receptive audience among a rural and urban population subjected to growing government control and taxation.

Yet, when the revolt started that toppled Amanullah, it does not appear to have been opposition to the reforms or the agitation of the religious establishment which initiated it. Instead the religious establishment only acquired a role in the revolt after it had started by providing it with religious legitimacy. In so doing, they utilised the revolt as a vehicle to remove what had become a threat to their interests. What sparked the revolt, which began among Shinwari in Nangarhar in November 1928, seems to have been opposition to increasing government controls that threatened local economic interests.7 Only after the fighting between the tribesmen

7) Gregorian (1969:263-64) and Poullada (1973:160-66) agree on this but present different accounts of the actual events. Gregorian states that the revolt began when tax collectors and army recruiting officers arrived in Shinwari territory and were fired upon. Poullada ascribes the rising to a failed attempt by government officials to interfere in the rivalry between the Shinwari and Mohmand tribes over the right to levy dues on traffic through the Khyber Pass.
and the government had begun did religious agitation against the Amanullah government gain ground. This succeeded in mobilising large sections of the Pashtun tribes in the east where government control broke down. Meanwhile, another revolt had started in the areas immediately to the north of Kabul. Here, banditry had been increasing as a reaction to increased taxation and administrative abuses and one of these bandits, a Tajik called Bacha-i Saqao (‘The Son of the Water Carrier’), attacked Kabul with his followers. The attack was repelled and, in an attempt to stabilise the situation, Amanullah cancelled most of his controversial reforms but it was too late. The forces of Bacha-i Saqao attacked Kabul again in January 1929 and managed to capture the city with the help of defecting army units. Amanullah was forced to flee to Kandahar and finally left Afghanistan in April 1929, never to return.

Backed by many religious leaders, Bacha-i Saqao had himself proclaimed king in January 1929, and his brief reign lasted till October 1929. Amanullah’s reforms were abolished and Kabul descended into lawlessness where public buildings were looted and former government officials and other suspected enemies were imprisoned, executed and had their property confiscated (Gregorian 1969:275).

In March 1929, Nadir Khan, a member of the Mohammadzai clan and former minister of defence, returned to Khost in Eastern Afghanistan to gather support among the Pashtun tribes to overthrow Bacha-i Saqao. With appeals to Pashtun resentment against a non-Pashtun ruler in Kabul, Nadir Khan managed to gather support from a number of Eastern tribes including sections of the large Ghilzai tribe. With this force he was able to take Kabul. Bacha-i Saqao surrendered and was executed and, since Nadir Khan had no money with which to reward his tribal warriors, they looted Kabul despite his orders to the contrary (ibid:186).

Consolidation of the Monarchy

With the backing of a jirga from his tribal army, Nadir Khan became Nadir Shah, king of Afghanistan, in October 1929. The problems that confronted him resembled those which former Afghan monarchs had faced. The authority of the state had been weakened during the rebellion against Amanullah, and the tribal and religious elites had reasserted their power. Although Nadir Shah was not opposed to modernisation, his primary objective was the consolidation of the power of the monarchy and whatever reforms were undertaken had to accommodate this goal.
To consolidate his position, Nadir Shah began to rebuild the army with British support and at the same time made important concessions to the traditionalist forces that had brought him to power. A new constitution introduced in 1931 gave the ulama a stronger role in legal matters and established the Hanafi Sharia of Sunni Islam as the official religion of the country (Dupree 1973:464). Through parliament, the rural elite was given authority to veto changes in taxation, a concession which, as discussed in the next chapter, significantly reduced the capacity of the state to finance development on its own.

New International Alignments

Nadir Shah was assassinated in 1933, and was succeeded by his nineteen-year old son, Mohammad Zahir (1933-73). During the first twenty years of the new king’s reign, effective power was wielded by his two uncles in their role as prime minister. Mohammad Hashem ruled autocratically until 1946, when he was replaced by his brother, Shah Mahmud, who held elections to the so-called ‘liberal’ parliament, which sat from 1949 to 1952. In 1953, Daoud Khan, a cousin of Zahir Shah, seized power, apparently with the concurrence of the king, and held the position as prime minister until 1963.

After the end of the Second World War, during which Afghanistan had remained neutral, the country faced a new international environment. The British withdrawal from their Indian empire and the creation of India and Pakistan in 1947 brought the issue of Pashtunistan to the forefront. Although successive Afghan governments since the time of Abdur Rahman had confirmed the Durand Line as Afghanistan’s Eastern border, influential segments within the Pashtun political elite had never accepted it as permanent. Thus, both during the process that led to the formation of Pakistan and afterwards, the Afghans supported the demand for self-determination by some of the Pashtuns in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province (Dupree 1973:485-94). This issue made Afghanistan oppose Pakistan’s entry into the UN. At the same time, Afghanistan was dependent on Pakistan for access to international markets, and in 1950, 1955, and 1961-63 Pakistan pressured Afghanistan into stopping its interference by closing the border to Afghan transit trade. Since at the time transit facilities through Iran were poor, Afghanistan had nowhere else to turn but to the Soviet Union. In 1950 the two countries signed a trade agreement and over the years their trade increased substantially. In time the Soviet Union emerged as Afghanistan’s principal trading partner.
This trade was followed by military collaboration. By the mid 1950s Pakistan had joined both the Baghdad Pact (later CENTO) and SEATO, and had thus become an important American ally. Afghan attempts to obtain military aid from the USA came to nothing, and again the Afghans turned to the Soviet Union, which had earlier offered such assistance. In 1956 Afghanistan signed the first agreement regarding the supply of military equipment from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and Afghan military personnel began to receive training in the Soviet Union, though some also went to the USA. Thus, the price of Afghanistan’s policy regarding Pashtunistan was a deepening dependence on the Soviet Union.

The Emergence of the Left

The long-drawn Pashtunistan crisis of 1961-63 contributed to the downfall of Daoud, who had been the driving force behind the inflexible Afghan stand on the issue. For the first time since his reign began in 1933, Zahir Shah now also ruled. Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan were normalised with Iran as a mediator. The king’s next step was to establish a constitutional committee, and a new constitution was approved by a loya jirga in September 1964. Although the new constitution banned members of the royal family from membership of the parliament or government, final power remained with the king. Parliamentary elections were held in 1965 and 1969. Most of the elected members of the parliament represented the rural elite and the ulama but it also included some representatives who were critical of the monarchy. Among these, four members of the newly formed communist party obtained seats in the 1965 parliament and two in that elected in 1969.

A communist party, the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), held its inaugural congress in January 1965, probably in the expectation that political parties would now be allowed. The new constitution had promised freedom to form political parties but, while the parliament passed the necessary law, it was never ratified by the king. Two of the party’s leading members, the secretary-general of the central committee Nur Mohammad Taraki and the deputy secretary general Babrak Karmal both had a past in the opposition movement Wikh-e Zalmaiyan (Awakened Youth), which had been formed during the brief period of the ‘liberal’ parliament. As had been the case with the Wikh-e Zalmaiyan, the PDPA drew the bulk of its fairly limited following from the dissatisfied among the urban intelligentsia and the students. With the growth of
modern education, this social group had increased significantly especially during the sixties, and education was no longer the prerogative of the rich alone. At the same time, the nepotism within the establishment restricted the avenues for social mobility and from the late sixties onwards government employment, which had previously absorbed most of the graduates, became increasingly scarce (Arnold 1983:26-27).

In the years after its first congress, at least three different political currents developed within the PDPA. The Khalq (‘People’ or ‘Masses’) headed by Taraki and the Parcham (‘Banner’) headed by Karmal were each named after the papers published by the faction in question. Both factions were ideologically oriented towards Moscow and, while questions of political strategy did divide them, the main reasons for their split in 1967 seems to have been personal rivalry and differences in the social composition of their following. Both factions were predominantly Pashtun, but whereas most of the members of Parcham came from the relatively well-off sections of Kabul’s population, those of Khalq were predominantly people with a rural background. The third current comprised the two pro-Peking groups of Shola-e Jawed (‘Eternal Flame’) and Sitame-e Melli (‘National Oppression’), and drew its following from non-Pashtuns and comprised many Shia (ibid:38-39).

Two Coups d’Etat

Against a background of mounting economic problems intensified by the droughts in 1970 and 1971, Daoud siezed power trough a coup in July 1973, proclaiming Afghanistan a republic with himself as president. The coup succeeded with the support of a group of leftist officers, some of whom were affiliated with Parcham, which had developed a following in the officer corps. Four members of Parcham obtained seats in the new government, which promised to undertake substantial reforms. However, the alliance only lasted a few months. The Parcham members were removed from power and the regime emerged as a continuation of Mohammadzai rule in authoritarian republican disguise. No independent political activity was allowed but in 1975 Daoud established his own political party, the National Revolutionary Party (Hizb-e Inqilab-e Milli).

The internal shift in Daoud’s regime was accompanied by a change in international relations which aimed at reducing dependency on the Soviet Union while at the same time strengthening the financial basis of the Afghan state. Stronger ties were developed with Iran, which in 1975 of-
ferred credits amounting to two billion US Dollars. Steps were also taken towards an accommodation with Pakistan regarding Pashtunistan, and the Afghan government closed the border to the Baluch separatists who had until then operated from Southern Afghanistan. Thus a process was started which would lead Afghanistan from its dependency on the Soviet Union towards a regional grouping dominated by Iran, a close ally of the USA.

The absence of a mass following for the communists plus the lessons from Parcham's success in gaining an organisational foothold within the military, and its failure to obtain influence through collaboration with the political elite of the country, made Khalq begin to establish a political following within the armed forces. At the same time Khalq and Parcham began to move towards reconciliation. A reunification was achieved in 1977, but only after lengthy negotiations requiring external mediation (ibid:54).

Although the PDPA was preparing to seize power through a coup supported by the military, the date when the actual coup took place seems accidental (ibid:57). The event that triggered the coup was the murder of a leading Parchami, Mir Akbar Khyber, on 17 April 1978. His funeral in Kabul turned into a massive demonstration of discontent with the Daoud regime. On 26 April the police arrested leading PDPA members including Taraki, Karmal and Hafizullah Amin, who had been responsible for Khalq's organisational links to the military. He ordered the party's network within the army into action, and on 27 April army units commanded by members of the party successfully seized power after a day of fighting in Kabul in which Daoud and members of his family were killed. Although power had been seized by the military, it was wielded by the party and, in the Revolutionary Council, that was announced the next day, thirty members were civilians while only five were military.

In the first PDPA cabinet announced on 1 May, Taraki was prime minister, Kamal deputy prime minister, Amin minister of foreign affairs, while a Parchami held the key position as minister of defence. Although the distribution of power in the cabinet between Khalq and Parcham was carefully balanced, the underlying rivalry between the two factions soon surfaced again. In June leading members of Parcham were sent abroad as ambassadors and in August the minister of defence as arrested for plotting against the government. With Parcham marginalised, a power struggle developed within Khalq, and in September 1979, Hafizullah Amin removed Taraki from power and took over his position.
By then the rebellion against the communist regime which had started in the summer of 1978 had grown into a civil war. It seems to have been caused more by the misrule and oppression of the new regime than by its attempts at reform (cf. Christensen 1979/80). Faced with the risk of losing their influence in Afghanistan if the Communist regime collapsed, and with the intransigency of Amin, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan on the 27 December 1979 and installed Babrak Karmal as the head of a client regime in which Parcham was the dominant faction. In 1986, Karmal was replaced first as head of the PDPA and then as president with Dr. Najibullah, who after his return together with Karmal had been heading the dreaded state security agency. The policy of ‘national reconciliation’, which had begun under Karmal, was continued and attempts were made to broaden the support base of the regime by involving political groups outside the PDPA. These attempts were not very successful and internally the regime continued to be riven by factional rivalries, victimization of political opponents and corruption. Most of the reforms introduced after the seizure of power in 1978 were abandoned, and the party even changed its name from PDPA to Watan (Homeland) in an effort to distance itself from its communist image. To the extent that this policy succeeded in strengthening the regime, it was not because of any ideological reorientation but because it relied on the same type of patronage relations which had also been practised by previous Afghan rulers.

The Communist rule and the period of Amanullah contain some significant parallels. At both occasions reforms were imposed by rulers whose ideological following was almost exclusively urban and at small in number, and who were out of tune with the sentiments and values of the majority of the population. In both cases reforms were initiated from the top down without sufficient preparation and without the understanding and acceptance of those they were supposed to benefit. Neither Amanullah nor the communists had any organisational linkage with the population in the countryside except through ‘traditional’ relations of patronage with members of the local elite. Thus, apart from the army, both Amanullah and the communists had to base their influence in the countryside on the very people whose power their reforms were intended to reduce, and in both cases this eventually meant that they had to seek a compromise with these. Moreover, in both cases the initial revolts were responses to increasing government interference and abuses rather than ideologically motivated counter-revolution. It is therefore somewhat surprising that, while the Afghan communists were later to praise Amanullah as a champion of modernisation, they never seem to have drawn any political les-
sons from his failure. What distinguished the two periods, apart from the brutality perpetrated by the communist regime, was the massive assistance they received from the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries. It was this assistance which kept the communist regime in power. As soon as this ended when the Soviet Union collapsed, the regime in Kabul also broke crumbled when it could no longer maintain the patronage relations with local leaders that had sustained it. Thus, as had happened after the two British invasions during the nineteenth century, the final outcome of the Soviet intervention was the same: the disintegration of the Afghan state.
Development and Disruption

Afghan Agriculture before the War

Even before the war Afghanistan was one of the world’s least industrialised countries, and much of the industry which existed then is today destroyed or damaged. Being un-industrialised, pre-war Afghanistan was predominantly a rural society. Around 85 per cent of the population were estimated to live in the countryside as farmers, pastoralists, and artisans. The cultivable area constituted only 7.6 million hectares or 12 per cent of the land surface. Of this 1.4 million ha were rain-fed and 5.2 million irrigated. Only 1.4 million ha of the irrigated area received sufficient water for double cropping, and of the remaining 3.8 million ha, half had to be left fallow each year due to insufficient water. Yet irrigated land yielded 77 per cent of the country’s primary food-grain wheat, and 85 per cent of all food and industrial crops. High yielding varieties of wheat and rice were introduced together with the use of chemical fertilizer from the late sixties onwards. From 1968 to 1978 the production of wheat increased with around 13 per cent from 2,354,000 tons to 2,652,000 tons, and by the mid-seventies the country had reached self-sufficiency in food-grains.

Since no comprehensive reliable statistics exist on the pre-war distribution of landownership, there is considerable room for interpretation. The National Atlas of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan published in 1985 as a joint effort by Afghanistan and Poland states that “.. the distribution of land was very uneven: big landowners, who made up 5 per


cent of all landholders, owned about 45 per cent of cultivated land, while at the same time, 35 per cent of all peasants did not have any land at all” (p. viii). While it is clear that substantial differences in landownership did exist, it is questionable whether they were as pronounced as claimed here. Most studies agree that the basic characteristic of Afghan agriculture was that the bulk of the farmers were small landowners, who as a group held most of the land. 10 Thus, on the basis of a survey conducted in 1963, Dupree shows that 60.5 per cent of all agricultural land was owner operated, while the Agricultural Survey of Afghanistan undertaken by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in 1987, holds that as many as 80 per cent of all farmers in Afghanistan cultivated their own land, when the war began in 1978 (SCA 1988: Table 4). 11 At the same time, important variations existed between different parts of the country. In the provinces north of the Hindu Kush, where a substantial part of the country’s food-grains were cultivated, and in the west, there were quite substantial differences in landownership. In the agriculturally less significant, but densely populated east, small holdings were predominant, although larger holdings were not uncommon. Generally, though, in the Afghan context even large land-holdings were not very large compared with those of other countries in the region, and the small holdings were often very small. Nationally, level the average farm size was only 16.7 jerib or about 3.3 ha. 12 Yet, whether precise or not, general figures on land ownership as those presented above gloss the complex social arrangements which structured land tenure in Afghanistan. Besides private property in agricul-

11) Thus, Dupree (1973: Chart 11 on p.148) presents a table based on a survey from 1963 which shows that 60.5 per cent of all agricultural land was ‘owner operated’. The other categories in this table are ‘sharecropped’ (13.8 per cent), ‘mortgaged’ (5.5 per cent), and ‘other’ (20.2 per cent) which is not explained. The UN states that before 1978 “...50 per cent of the farmers owned their land and were self-sufficient or produced some surplusses, 25 per cent were sharecroppers and 25 per cent were landless labourers” (UNOCA 1988: 91). The UN figures miss an important feature of Afghan agriculture, namely that very many farmers owned so little land that they were neither self-sufficient nor surplus producing, but had to supplement their income from share-cropping or as labourers. Thus, the UN categories are overlapping; some share-cropers might also be petty landowners and vice versa.
12) One jerib is 0.195 hectare or around 2,000 sq.m. The figure of an average farm size of 16.7 jerib originates from the Ministry of Planning, and is quoted from the SCA report (1988:13). The survey conducted by the SCA concludes a higher average farm size of 23,2 jerib. In the east the average farm size was as little as 6 jerib, in the north 63 jerib, and in the west 28 jerib (ibid: Table 1).
tural land, local kinship groups also held various forms of shared rights to land which could be used for grazing, collection of fuel and in some areas also dry farming. This provided those members of the local kinship group, who held little or no private land, with opportunities to supplement their income. In addition to this, two other important institutions regulated the access to land, namely share-cropping and mortgaging.

The larger holdings were mostly farmed by share-croppers, who paid the owner part of the yield after each harvest. The social context of tenancy, where tenants were a source of status and political influence for the landowner, meant that even relatively small landholdings, which could have been cultivated by the owner, were often partly or entirely cultivated by tenants. Conversely, small landowners, with insufficient land to feed their family, would often farm additional land as share-croppers.

In the villages land ownership was not just a source of income but also a basic component of social identity and status. Land was therefore more often mortgaged in a transaction called geraw than sold outright. In this transaction the borrower, in return for the loan and in lieu of interest, transferred the right to cultivate a piece of land to the creditor. The borrower still retained title to the land and thus continued to be a landowner and consider himself as such, even if this was his last piece of land, and he might never actually be able to accumulate the money to repay the loan and regain his land. The role as either borrower or creditor was not only practised by large landowners. For small farmers or even tenants it was a means to obtain control over land in a situation where little land were available for sale and where prices were high.

The combined result of the intricate land tenure arrangements, a predominantly pre-industrial agricultural technology relying on human labour and ox-drawn ploughs, and the significant (if modest) increases in production was to enable a very high proportion of the Afghan population to gain a living from agriculture and to remain in the countryside. Pre-war Afghanistan did not experience the massive migration from the countryside to the towns resulting in those wretched squatter settlements which are a feature of large towns in most other Third World countries. Even in Kabul, where a growing number of rural migrants did settle from the six-

13) In the eastern provinces of Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar and Paktia it is generally held that 3 jerib of irrigated double-cropped land is sufficient to feed a family. It is common for tenants to pay two-thirds of the harvest to the owner, which means that a holding over 10 jerib can feed both the owner and at least one share-cropper.
ties onwards, this emigration was not on a scale which resulted in extensive slums (Bechhoefer 1977).14 Yet, at the same time there were strong indications that the countryside did experience growing population pressure, and that more and more of the rural poor were finding it increasingly difficult to gain a livelihood in the villages. The predominance of small landholdings coupled with Islamic inheritance laws, where property was shared equally among brothers, meant increasing and rapid land fragmentation.15 A growing number of farms were becoming so small that they could no longer feed a family. Another factor, which also had the potential of reducing the possibilities of gaining a livelihood for the rural poor, was the expanding mechanization of agriculture. Although not very big in absolute terms, the use of tractors was spreading rapidly during the seventies.16 Due to economic and ecological conditions, the growth of tractor mechanization was geographically uneven but, where it did take place, it tended to upset existing social balances in a way which deprived the poorer members of society of employment opportunities and access to resources (see Anderson 1978).

Although not visible in the form of squatter slum settlements around the larger towns, large-scale migration from the rural areas did in fact take place before the war. That the bulk of these migrants did not head for the larger towns in Afghanistan was probably because there were no jobs available due to the lack of industrialisation. Instead they went abroad, primarily to Iran where about 600,000 Afghan labourers were estimated to be working during the seventies. Others went to the Gulf States and some even to Pakistan, itself an area of large-scale labour export.

14) Bechhoefer (1977) shows, that while there was illegal squatter housing on government land in Kabul, these were of a quality comparable to good houses in the countryside and belonged to people whose income had already risen considerably above subsistence level. The influx of poor rural immigrants was still only of a magnitude where they could be absorbed into the old crowded residential areas of Kabul. In addition, many migrants maintained some rights to land in the villages they had left, and continued to receive part of the produce from their relatives there.

15) According to Islamic law sisters should inherit half the share their brothers get. But, at least among the Pashtuns in the Eastern part of the country this was not practised, and land was divided only among men.

16) The SCA 1988 survey presents figures for 1978 which show both the extent and regional variation of tractor mechanization (Table 7). It was most pronounced in the Northwestern provinces (Badghis, Herat, Farah and Ghor) and in the Southwest (Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan and Nimruz) where close to 15 per cent of all farmers cultivated with their own or hired tractors; the rest used oxen. Next came the North (Samangan, Balkh, Jowzjan and Faryab) with around 8.5 per cent using their own or hired tractors. In the three regions comprising the rest of the country - the Northeast, South-east and East-Central - the figure for tractor cultivation was below 5 per cent.
Three Decades of Development

Until the mid-fifties the pace of industrial development remained extremely slow. During the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman (1880-1901), workshops had been established mainly to cater to the needs of the army, and a small hydro-electrical plant had been built under Habibullah (1901-19) at Jabal us-Seraj north of Kabul. In the twenties, Amanullah (1919-29) had a few new workshops built in Kabul, and much machinery including a cement factory was imported but never assembled and used. Attempts were made to encourage the formation of joint stock companies, but the effort failed (Guha 1967:177). Thus, “. . . no important industrial projects were completed in Afghanistan in the 1920s” (Gregorian 1969:253). In the early thirties the government granted monopolies on certain imports and exports to a group of merchants headed by Abdul Majid Zabuli (Fry 1974:83). This trade was undertaken through joint stock companies, and Zabuli also established Afghanistan’s first bank, the Bank-e Milli, in collaboration with the government. Apart from credits for trading companies, during the thirties the Bank-e Milli also extended credits which funded the developing of lands for cotton cultivation in Kunduz province and establishment of textile and sugar industries (Dupree 1973:473). Despite these initiatives there were less than ten industrial units in Afghanistan by 1945 (Kraus 1974:329).

During Daoud’s decade as prime minister (1953-63) the state assumed a more active role in the economic development of the country. In 1956 the first of a series of five-year development plans was launched. The priority of both the first (1956-61) and the second plan (1962-67) was to provide the basic infrastructure such as roads and power plants necessary for the overall development of the economy. At the same time investments were made in mining and to a lesser extent in manufacturing industries. Within the agricultural sector the bulk of the resources was used for a number of large-scale irrigation projects, whereas measures to increase on-farm production were given less emphasis. Health and education services, which had been rudimentary till then, were also expanded considerably. During the third five-year plan (1967-1972) the emphasis shifted from infrastructure and energy development towards industrial development and, while large scale irrigation continued to absorb huge resources, more attention was given to support the capacity of individual farmers to increase production (Kraus 1974:299). The goal was to promote agricultural productivity and the production of consumer and export goods. At the same time, more scope was created for private enterprise
when a new law on private investment was passed in 1967 and an Industrial Development Bank was established in 1972 (ibid:343). The fourth plan (1972-77) contained similar goals, but was disrupted due to the coup by Daoud in July 1973 (Noorzoy 1976:763). Daoud’s own seven-year plan launched in 1976 was likewise disrupted by the Communist coup.

The development effort resulted in a considerable expansion of the road system, which stimulated both foreign and domestic trade. It also laid the foundation for the emergence of a national market that contributed to reduce regional price differences of food grains.\(^\text{17}\) The approximately 2,500 km of unpaved roads, which Afghanistan possessed at the beginning of the forties had by the seventies been expanded to 17,000 km of motorable roads, of which 2,700 were paved (Kraus 1974:349). The electricity supply had increased to an estimated 408 MW, of which 256 MW were generated by hydro-electric power stations, 48 MW by gas and the rest by diesel generators.\(^\text{18}\)

Natural gas was discovered in 1958 and exploitation began in 1967. The reserves are estimated at 100 to 150 billion cubic meters.\(^\text{19}\) Since exploitation began, more than 95 per cent of the volume extracted was exported to the Soviet Union at prices below those of the world market as part of barter trade agreements between the two countries. Besides gas, Afghanistan possesses substantial and commercially viable deposits of a many different minerals and exploitation of some of these, including coal, copper and salt, was taken up. Other minerals such as the huge iron deposits estimated at two billion tons at Hajigak have never been exploited due to the difficulties of access (Kraus 1974:330).

Some industrial development did take place, and between 1967 and 1971 the number of manufacturing companies with 20 or more employees grew from 66 to 138 (ibid:342). By far the largest sector was textiles followed by construction (cement and pre-fabricated elements) and processing of agricultural raw materials. The bulk of the companies were either small or medium sized, and nearly 60 per cent had fewer than 100 employees (ibid:336). Despite the legal and financial mechanisms created to stimulate private enterprise, the public sector was still dominant. Of the estimated 45,000 persons employed in industry, 66 per cent worked in

\(^\text{17}\) However, Fry argues that, even by the early seventies, the lack of rural feeder roads linking the hinterland to the main road system provided a competitive advantage to the movement of agricultural surpluses to the major towns, so that rural areas with wheat deficits continued to be in a disadvantaged position (1994:58).


\(^\text{19}\) Ibid, p. 149.
public sector enterprises, and capital investment in this sector was five times that of the private sector (Fry 1974:12).

Although the development of education during the sixties and seventies had been impressive, the capacity of the educational system was still so limited that it could only serve a minority of the population.20

Table 1: Growth in Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1,590</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>126,092</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>2,567</td>
<td>497,911</td>
<td>12,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>3,971</td>
<td>719,744</td>
<td>19,933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>4,006</td>
<td>928,066</td>
<td>26,687</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By 1971 nearly 83 per cent of the educational institutions were primary schools (1st to 6th grade), 11 per cent were middle schools (7th to 9th grade) and around 4 per cent were high schools (10th to 12th grade) (Kraus 1974:369).21 Only about 4 per cent of the students attended high schools. Teacher training of three years duration was undertaken in seven of the larger towns, and 15 of the 28 provinces had vocational training of different kinds. In 1976 the total number of male students were 804,093 while female students only numbered 123,973 (Ghani 1990:160). However, in the capital this discrepancy was less pronounced, and female students constituted 35 per cent of the total compared with 13 per cent nationally (ibid). At the Kabul University, which had 7,400 students in 1971, the proportion of women was only 14 per cent (Kraus 1994:378).

Developments within the health sector were less impressive with a very uneven distribution between urban and rural areas. By 1978 there were 64 hospitals, 157 basic health centres and 132 sub-health centres. Most of these were in the larger towns, and only 25 per cent of the country’s population was estimated to be covered by some form of health service delivery.22

---

20) The figures in the table are from Ghani (1990:159).
21) Although the figures in Kraus are slightly lower than those quoted in the table above (namely 3,600 institutions, 668,000 students and 19,000 teachers), they are of the same magnitude.
Dependent Development

The development which took place in Afghanistan between the fifties and the seventies was heavily dependent on foreign aid. During the period until the early seventies, Afghanistan “...received one of the highest levels of technical assistance on a per capita basis of any country in the world” (Fry 1974:69).

That this was possible was to a large extent due to the competition between the Soviet Union and the USA, especially during the late fifties, which turned Afghanistan into ‘an economic Korea’ (Dupree 1973:514). By 1978 the Soviet assistance to Afghanistan totalled 1,265 million dollars, while by 1977 that of the USA amounted to 470 million dollars.

That the heavy reliance on foreign aid was necessary was a result of the inability of successive Afghan governments to generate the domestic revenue required to finance the costs of development. One major reason for this was that the most important sector in the economy, namely agriculture, paid hardly any direct taxes (Fry 1974:155). From the time of Amir Abdur Rahman till the overthrow of Amanullah in 1929, agriculture had been heavily taxed. The assumption of power by Nadir Shah and the rule of his successors rested on an alliance with the rural elite, and this elite acquired the formal authority through the national assemblies to veto any increases in the direct taxation of agriculture (ibid). As a result, the value of the land tax declined with 60 per cent between 1952 and 1973 (ibid:172-73). The main source of revenue for the Afghan state consisted of indirect taxes, which in 1973 constituted 86 per cent of the total tax revenue. Of these indirect taxes those on foreign trade comprised 67 per cent of the total revenue (ibid).23

By 1972 the bulk of the domestic revenue generated by the Afghan state (nearly 81 per cent) was used to pay for the administration and army (28 per cent). Most of what remained (17 per cent) was used for repayment of foreign debts incurred during the previous three five-year plans, and only slightly more than 2 per cent remained for development activities (Kraus 1974:302). The domestic financing of the four five-year plans

23) The income from these taxes were reduced by the very extensive smuggling which took place. By value smuggled imports were estimated to exceed legal imports (Schäfer 1974:27).
including the government’s domestic borrowing amounted to around 20 to 25 per cent. The rest was financed through foreign aid consisting of credits and commodity assistance (Fry 1974:70).

**Material Destruction and Economic Disruption**

After nearly sixteen years of war the extent of devastation in Afghanistan is almost unimaginable. While the level of destruction differs between provinces, districts and even neighbouring localities, the effects of the war are visible nearly everywhere. In addition to the material destruction and the collapse of government functions, mines constitute a serious problem. Whereas the rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance provided by the UN and NGOs since 1989 has achieved considerable results regarding agriculture, minor infrastructure, health, education, and de-mining, the rehabilitation of other sectors such as industry, communications and major infrastructure remains largely untouched.

Among the most crucial tasks to enable both repatriation and rehabilitation is de-mining. Although the Afghan NGOs involved in de-mining have made a number of areas safe for the return and resettlement of refugees, most of the mines in Afghanistan have still not been dealt with. It is estimated that by 1993 the total remaining mined area in Afghanistan comprised around 389 sq. km. Of these, approximately 113 sq.km had been identified as priority areas, where de-mining of villages, roads, irrigation canals and agricultural land was urgently required to enable a resumption of normal life. Since demining began in 1990, around 44 square kilometers of priority areas had been cleared by early 1994.

The main thrust of the mine clearance has been in provinces like Kunar, Paktia, Nangarhar, Logar, Kandahar, Helmand and Herat. These are the most heavily mined areas and also the ones to which most refugees return and most rehabilitation assistance is being provided. With the present level of funding and their present capacity the de-mining NGOs are capable of demining around 10 sq. km per year, which means that it will take around another five to six years before even the priority areas are cleared of mines. Yet the danger posed by the mines in the more than 300 sq.km

---

of non-priority areas will probably remain to threaten farmers, herders and travellers in the rural areas for generations to come.

In 1988 a comprehensive survey of the agricultural situation in Afghanistan concluded that the production had declined to less than half of the pre-war level.\textsuperscript{26} The substantial assistance comprising improved seed and fertilizer, together with the repair of irrigation systems which began in 1989, has resulted in a tangible improvement of agricultural production in large parts of Afghanistan, with the exception of the north-western provinces. By the end of 1994, FAO estimates that between 70 to 90 per cent of all wheat cultivated in the border provinces from Kunar down to Nimruz are new improved varieties.\textsuperscript{27} Since most of the wheat seed distributed so far are varieties that can only be used as winter crops at altitudes below 2,000m, improved varieties are not used on the same scale in other parts of the country. Nevertheless, even in high altitude east-central

\textsuperscript{26} The agricultural survey of Afghanistan, First Report, SCA, Peshawar, May 1988, p.4.
\textsuperscript{27} Personal communication by A. Fitzherbert, FAO/OPS. The assessment is supported by data from the SCA agricultural survey from 1993, which show that over the last four years, nationally 48 per cent of the farmers interviewed have begun to use improved varieties of wheat seed. In the border provinces of Paktika, Paktia and Kandahar the proportions are 100, 88, and 92 per cent respectively (Agriculture Survey of Afghanistan 1992-93’, 17th Report, Peshawar 1993, p.v.).
provinces like Ghazni, Logar and Wardak, an estimated 30 to 40 per cent of all spring sown wheat are these improved varieties. The improved varieties have increased the yields to around twice that of the local varieties.28

However, the re-establishment of a market for grain, as well as access to important inputs such as fertilizer, have been restricted by the difficult transport conditions inside Afghanistan. Roads are often blocked by rival mujaheddin groups and, until the emergence of the Taliban, transporters were subjected to repeated extortion and taxation at mujaheddin checkpoints. This has now changed in the eastern parts of the country under the control of the Taliban, but transport between some regions is still hampered by the political fragmentation of the country. Although the yield of the improved varieties is still higher than that of local varieties even without fertilizer, the use of fertilizer is necessary if their full yield potential is to be realised. Some fertilizer is provided by FAO through NGOs, and other supplies are smuggled across the border, but the difficulties of transport inside Afghanistan and the restrictions on exports from Pakistan limit supplies and influence prices. Even so, a survey by SCA from 1993 shows a significant improvement in the availability of fertilizer compared with the situation a few years back.29

In addition to the introduction of improved varieties of seed, the revival of agriculture is accompanied by other technical changes as well. While oxen are still the principal source of farm power for ploughing and threshing, the scarcity of draft animals has resulted in rapid mechanisation. The number of tractors has more than doubled compared with the situation before the war, and mechanical threshers are also used on an increasing scale.30 The increase has been most pronounced in areas like Baghlan and Kunduz in the north and in some of the eastern and southern provinces, which also previously had the highest rate of mechanisation. The tractors and threshers are owned by a small minority of the farmers, who hire them out to others. Although the wider implications of this rapid mechanisation are still undocumented, changes are likely to result regarding farming practices and land use patterns, income distribution and possibly even land ownership.

Although food is still smuggled across the border from Pakistan, or provided as aid by the WFP, the assistance to support the revival of agriculture has resulted in food surpluses in several areas including Kunar and

parts of Nangarhar. Unfortunately, the Afghan population has not been able to benefit fully from this. The fighting in Kabul during 1994 and the blocking of its supply routes have prevented these surpluses from reaching the city. Instead they were exported to Pakistan.

Whereas agriculture seems well on its way towards recovery in many areas of Afghanistan, this is not the case with other sectors of the economy and society. Even before the war, health services in Afghanistan were critically inadequate and did not reach the majority of the rural population at all. As a result of the war the previous health delivery system has almost completely collapsed. Most hospitals and clinics are damaged or totally destroyed, and a large share of the qualified medical personnel were either killed during the war or have fled the country. This has also affected the medical educational system, which has largely broken down. Since the mujaheddin takeover and start of fighting in Kabul, eight out of the city’s fourteen hospitals had ceased to function by late 1993, and the operation of the remaining hospitals had deteriorated sharply due to lack of electricity, medicines, equipment and personnel.31

Over the years the NGOs have built up primarily in the rural areas a health delivery system which is probably nearly as extensive as that which existed before the war.32 Recently, the aid agencies have begun to shift their focus from curative health services to preventive health care. However, despite this assistance the magnitude of the problems is such that health conditions in Afghanistan continue to be among the worst anywhere in the world.33

Poor sanitation and lack of access to safe drinking water is considered a primary cause of the widespread occurrence of diarrhoeal diseases. Since 1991, NGOs and the UN have been involved in the provision of safe drinking water, mainly in the form of dug wells fitted with hand pumps but also of piped water supply systems. Although the overall needs remain almost limitless, a fairly high coverage has nevertheless been achieved in some of the eastern provinces like Kunar, Nangarhar and Paktia, where access to safe drinking water is now far better than it was before the war. However, very little has been achieved with regard to sanitation.

As in the case of health services, the previous educational system is “...in a state of almost total collapse”.34 Here too, the assistance provided by the aid agencies has been considerable.35 However, apart from some supplementary teacher training, this assistance is mainly to primary schools, whereas education beyond this for the secondary and high school levels receive comparatively little support. Apart from some medical training the whole system of higher education no longer exists.36

The needs for rehabilitation of the educational system far surpass the present levels of assistance. The UN estimates that despite the extensive support for primary education, fewer than one in every five children of school age attend a primary school.37 Among those who enter, only a portion complete the first six grades of primary school. Thus, if one considers the high proportion of children in the Afghan population and the high annual population growth rate, the country “... seems destined to remain functionally illiterate and retarded in development for generations to come” unless massive assistance is provided to rehabilitate education.38

In addition to the breakdown of social services like health and education, the entire physical infrastructure of the country is badly damaged. The Afghan road network has been severely damaged due to both the war and general neglect. As much as 60 per cent of the highways require significant pavement reconstruction, while the rest is in need of minor repairs. In addition many structures ranging from major bridges to culverts require repairs or total reconstruction. Due to the magnitude of the task and the funds required, the road repair which has so far been undertaken by various agencies has mainly comprised unpaved roads. Because of problems regarding the maintenance of what had been repaired, the focus

35) Thus, by the end of 1994 the NGOs supported schools with a total of 268,000 pupils of which 42,000 were girls (Draft combined work plan for educational rehabilitation in Afghanistan for 1995, Peshawar, December 1994, p.4.). Nevertheless, according to official figures primary school enrollment has dropped by 84 per cent and the number of teachers with 75 per cent compared with 1978 (Afghanistan rehabilitation strategy: Action plan, Vol VI, UNDP, Kabul, October 1993, p.75.)
36) In April 1995, President Rabbani reopened Kabul University after a closure of three years. Fighting between rival mujeheddin groups accompanied by looting has seriously damaged the university and repairs are estimated to cost around fifty million dollars (The News, 11 April 1995)
37) Among the refugees the figure was 30 per cent in 1989 (Action Plan., Vol. VI, p.71).
of the NGOs has shifted from complete repairs to the less ambitious restoration of the road network to a usable condition, which will allow traffic to flow. This is also the aim of the planned UN support for road repair.

Whereas the aid agencies have provided some assistance for the rehabilitation of the sectors mentioned above, others have received little or no assistance at all. Thus, apart from the road network, other elements of the national communication system like civil aviation and telecommunications are also in a very bad shape. While the airport runways may be just useable, most of the support facilities like air traffic services, and navigational and meteorological functions have broken down in most areas of Afghanistan including the capital. The telecommunication system has suffered extensive damage. Urban telephone systems, switching systems and the national trunk network are largely damaged beyond repair. Out of the 295 telephone exchanges existing in 1979, 237 have been destroyed, and throughout the country practically all open wire transmission lines are either destroyed or have been looted.39

The present scarcity of power and fuel affects practically all essential functions of society ranging from public administration, health care and industrial production, to telecommunications, civil aviation and road transport. The whole pre-war infrastructure for transportation, storage and distribution of petroleum products has collapsed and the government owned tanker fleet is either destroyed or has been looted by various mujaheddin groups. Although some of these trucks are now operated on a private basis together with other private tankers that smuggle fuel into Afghanistan, the results are erratic supplies and regional price differences.

The entire electricity supply system is in a critical condition, since power plants, transformers and switching gear have operated for years without spare parts and preventive maintenance. In addition, about 60 per cent of the transmission lines have suffered extensive damage from war or looting. In particular the systems in and around Kabul and in the southwest, which together constituted about three fourth of the capacity, have suffered the most extensive deterioration.40 Where the electricity system functions at all, it is with frequent accidental blackouts in addition to regular loadshedding.

The coal supply has likewise decreased drastically and, out of four mines formerly in operation, only one still operates at around 40 per cent of its previous capacity.41 The other mines are either damaged or cannot

get their coal to the market due to lack of transport. Coal was widely used both for the cement, textile and food processing industries, as well as for household heating and cooking. Due to the lack of coal, households have where possible shifted to the use of wood fuel, thus further increasing the pressure on a resource, which is already overexploited.

Although the infrastructure for the exploitation of natural gas in the Jowzjan province of northern Afghanistan is largely intact, it is gradually deteriorating, and essential spareparts are not available. Gas exports used to be a significant source of income for the Afghan government, and the estimated loss of export earnings is in the range of 150 to 200 million US dollars per year.

Most of the limited manufacturing industry of Afghanistan has now either ceased to operate or are producing below capacity due to war damage, lack of raw materials, spareparts, or power. Apart from the industries processing agricultural raw materials like cotton and sugar, this also applies to cement and fertilizer, which are both important industries in the context of reconstruction. Although both these industries continue to function, their production is far below their previous capacity, and the difficulties of transport means that domestically produced cement and fertilizer are unavailable in many parts of the country despite the demand.

In a situation with increasing population pressure on available agricultural lands, and with limited employment opportunities in the rural areas, the rehabilitation of industry and the creation of conditions favourable to the establishment of new industries becomes crucial. The creation of new employment opportunities in industry would help to provide an alternative to the many youngsters who at present can only make a living as mujahed with some commander. Increased employment opportunities would also contribute towards reducing the population pressure on land, and thus the necessity to cultivate opium to survive. Moreover, since most of Afghanistan’s industry processed agricultural raw materials, its revival would also increase the value of such agricultural products, which in turn might lessen the dependency on opium as a cash crop.

41) The pre-war coal production was 210,000 tons. The only mine which remained in production by 1992 is the Karkar Doodkash mine in Baghlan (ibid).
43) The pre 1978 cement production capacity was around 160,000 tons per year. A new cement factory in Herat would have added another 150,000 tons to the output, but it was never finished due to the war. Fertilizer output was around 120,000 tons of Urea from a plant in Mazar-i Sharif, while most of the DAP was imported (First consolidated report, UNOCA, Geneva 1988, p. 143).
nally, at least part of the manufacturing sector could provide employment opportunities for women.

During the period from March to May 1993, the UNDP in collaboration with the authorities in Kabul prepared an *Afghanistan Rehabilitation Strategy* comprising an action plan for immediate rehabilitation. It is estimated that over a two year period, the broad rehabilitation needs regarding agriculture, infrastructure, social services, energy and industry will require funding in the magnitude of 622 million dollars.

The UNDP *Action Plan* envisages a number of quick impact projects to support the recovery of both the energy sector and industrial production if security conditions make this feasible. The overall strategy will be to undertake measures to “... help fulfil the basic needs of Afghan society; increase the availability of consumer goods; employ labour-intensive production methods and appropriate technologies; use a high proportion of domestically produced resources and inputs; supply intermediate goods and raw materials in support of other sectors; and have a favourable balance of payments impact” (p.ii). To achieve this, the UN considers that state involvement in the industrial sector should be reduced drastically. Unviable state enterprises should be closed, and the rest should either be privatised or managed by the state on commercial lines. According to the *Action Plan* these recommendations are in line with present government policy. Thus, the overall thrust of the planned UN assistance seems to incorporate elements of the ‘structural adjustment programmes’ advocated by international organisations like the World Bank. Deregulation and encouragement of private enterprise appear necessary as a means to promote economic recovery in a situation where a future central government will be both politically and financially weak. However, the likely implications of such a policy with regard to a deepening of economic inequalities should not be overlooked.
The Social and Cultural Context of Resistance and Civil War

This chapter examines the cultural categories and social dynamics which have shaped the evolving context for both the resistance struggle and the civil war, and thus also for the international assistance to Afghanistan. Among the central elements that constitute this context is the cultural diversity of Afghanistan's people in terms of languages and religious affiliation. This diversity provides the main components for different identities. Outsiders usually refer to these different identities as 'ethnic groups' whereas the Afghans themselves use the term qaum, which denotes common origin and cultural sameness. However, the concept of 'ethnic groups' can be analytically problematical, and that of qaum is also not self-evident since it can be used to denote different levels of inclusiveness. These problems of terminology and definition reflect the fact that the groups and identities in question are neither given nor constant but are themselves influenced by other social factors and processes.

Socio-cultural Diversity

More than thirty different languages belonging to four or possibly five linguistic families are spoken in Afghanistan, namely the Iranian, Turkic, Indo-Aryan, Semitic and Dravidian. Of these the speakers of the two Iranian languages, Pashto and Persian, constitute the large majority. These two are also the official languages which are used as the medium for teaching and administration. Next comes a sizeable number amounting to around ten per cent of the population who speak the Turkic languages of which Uzbeki and Turkmani are the most important. In contrast, the speakers of one or the other of the many different Indo-Aryan languages only constitute about one to two per cent of the total.
Those who identify themselves as Arabs are just a tiny minority and among these even fewer actually speak Arabic (Orywal 1986:39). Whether any of the speakers of the Dravidian language Brahui, who live in Pakistan's Baluchistan province, are to be found across the border in Afghanistan is not entirely clear (Ibid:38). Persian and Pashto then, are clearly the dominant languages and, since most of the speakers of the different minority languages also speak one or the other or even both of the two main languages, most Afghans are therefore able to communicate with each other despite the profound linguistic diversity.

The overwhelming majority of Afghanistan's population (99 per cent) are Muslims. The remaining small minority is composed mainly of Hindus and Sikhs together with a few hundred Jews. An estimated 80 per cent of the Afghan people follow the Hanafi doctrine of Sunni Islam, while the remaining 20 per cent are Shia Muslims, who either adhere to the Imami version as practised in Iran or are Ismaili Shia, i.e. the followers of the Agha Khan. In addition to these sectarian divisions, the Sunni Muslims are further subdivided since many, but not all, are members of different Sufi orders.

Map 3: Major ethnic divisions of Afghanistan

Together, language and religion provide major parameters for the cultural identity of different ethnic groups. The spatial distribution of these groups has been influenced by the topography of Afghanistan. The Hindu Kush mountains, which cuts diagonally through the country from east to
west, are inhabited by a number of different religious or linguistic minority groups like the Ismaili Tajik, Hazara of both Ismaili and Imami persuasions, and the speakers of Indo-Aryan languages like the Nuristani and the Pashai. The surrounding foothills, plains and towns are predominantly inhabited by the Sunni majority comprising the speakers of Iranian languages such as the Pashtun, Tajik, Aimaq, and Baluch, and the Turkic-speaking Uzbek and Turkoman. Afghanistan's geographical location has made it a cultural transition zone between Central, South, and West Asia, and the diversity of the groups which inhabit the country exhibit historical influences and cultural continuities with these three areas. As can be seen from the map above, nearly all of the different ethnic groups in Afghanistan are also living across its borders in the neighbouring countries of Pakistan, Iran and the former Soviet Central Asian republics.

The Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in the country, and constitute between 40 and 50 per cent of the population. The main Pashtun 'homeland' forms an arch stretching from the southern foothills of the Hindu Kush in Eastern Afghanistan through the southern parts of the country almost till the Herat oasis in the West. In addition, groups of Pashtuns are settled as a minority population among other ethnic groups in parts of Northern Afghanistan. Altogether, the Pashtuns probably number between 14 and 16 million, and roughly half live across the border in the neighbouring areas of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province and Northeastern Baluchistan. Apart from a small minority of Shia among the Pashtuns in Pakistan, all other Pashtuns are Sunni Muslims. Most Pashtuns are farmers but a sizeable proportion are nomads and others live in the towns as labourers, traders and civil servants. The Pashtuns probably constitute the largest tribal society on earth. They consider the different named tribal groups like the Durrani, Ghilzai, Mohmand, etc. as being related within a large ramified patrilineal descent system. While the comprehension of this larger system may be vague, each Pashtun nevertheless considers him or herself as being the descendant of a common ancestor. This, together with their history as the dominant ethnic group, forms the basis for the superiority which the Pashtuns feel in relation to other groups in the country.

The second largest ethnic group, if it is indeed a group, is the Tajik, who number somewhere between two and four millions. A large part of

44) The Turi tribe in the Kurram Agency and some Orakzai in the neighbouring Orakzai Agency constitute the only adherents to Shia Islam among the Pashtuns.
the artisans, traders, and civil servants, who constitute Afghanistan's urban population, are Tajiks. Others are farmers settled in the mountainous regions northeast of Kabul and their settlement area extends across the border into the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan. The most common definition of Tajik describes them as Persian speaking, non-tribal, Sunni Muslims (Orywal 1986:22). Yet, both in the literature on Afghanistan and among the inhabitants themselves, the designation 'Tajik' is also used for people who are neither Sunni Muslims nor Persian speakers. Thus, some of the people for whom this label is used belong to the Ismaili Shia minority groups in the Hindu Kush mountains. The name is also sometimes used for the so-called Farsiwan in the Herat region, who are Shia and culturally linked with the population across the border in Iran. Whereas these people would not use 'Tajik' to identify themselves, the term is used by others who also do not fit the general definition. In the main Kunar valley, a group calling themselves either Tajik or Dehgan are not Persian, but Pashto speaking (Christensen 1980:79). The only common denominator for the otherwise quite distinct groups who are called or call themselves Tajik, seems to be the absence of an encompassing descent system. Thus, for an outsider the name Tajik appears primarily to denote what these groups are not, namely Pashtun. This non-Pashtunness, together with the linguistic, religious and cultural features shared by some of the 'Tajik', seem to form the basis of a common identity. Yet, in the rural areas many, even of those who fit the definition above, use the name of the locality they live in rather than 'Tajik' to identify themselves to others. For the urban Tajik, it is their role as the those who embody the civilization associated with the Persian language which is a key element of their identity.

Further to the west on the Turkestan plains between the Hindu Kush mountains and the border with the former Soviet Union there are about one million Uzbeks and 3 to 400,000 Turkomans, who speak different Turkic languages. They too are settled across the border in former Soviet Central Asia, and many are descendants of refugees from Tsarist or Soviet rule. While the Turkomans identify themselves as members of larger tribal entities, this seems only to be the case with part of the Uzbeks (Orywal 1986:24). The Turkomans and most of the Uzbeks subsist on various combinations of farming and herding, and in addition many Uzbeks are settled both in the towns of Northern Afghanistan and elsewhere in the country.

In the Eastern part of Afghanistan's central highlands are the Hazaras, who number around one million. They speak a Persian dialect, and are divided between an Imami Shia majority and an Ismaili Shia minority.
The majority of the Hazaras are farmers but poverty has forced a substantial number to migrate to the larger towns, and in particular to Kabul, where most make a living as poorly paid labourers. This situation together with their religious identity and their marked Mongolian physical features have made them the object of discrimination from the Sunni majority.

In the Western part of the central highlands there live about 5-800,000 people collectively known as Aimaq by outsiders like the Pashtuns. They are organised in a number of different tribes and, while they share different attributes insofar as they are Sunni Muslims, speak Persian, are tribally organised and subsist on combinations of agriculture and animal husbandry were many are semi-nomadic, they do not identify themselves as Aimaqs. Instead they use the names of the specific tribal groups such as Taimani, Firuzkuhi, Jamshidi and Hazara-e Qala-e Nau.

In the deserts of South-Western Afghanistan are some 100,000 Baluch, who represent part of a larger population which is also living in the adjacent areas of Pakistan and Iran as nomads and farmers. In addition, small communities of Baluch are scattered over Western and Northern Afghanistan. While the Baluch in the South consider themselves members of a wider tribal system extending into the neighbouring countries, those living elsewhere in Afghanistan seem to be 'de-tribalised' although they still maintain their identity as Baluch (Ibid:35).
This description has only listed the major ethnic groups and is far from exhaustive. An attempt to provide a comprehensive list has resulted in the identification of no less than 57 different ethnic groups (Orywal 1986:9).\footnote{See Dupree (1973), Anderson & Strand (1978), Weekes (1978) Orywal (1986) and Digard (1988) for details on ethnic groups and inter-ethnic relations in Afghanistan.} Yet, as even the brief description above has shown, the categories and groups resulting from such an exercise are analytically problematic. The different groups that are identified cannot be considered fixed entities in the sense that their membership, distribution, and cultural features are given and unequivocal. One reason is that the groups defined as different ethnic entities are hardly comparable, since they share no common defining criterion. For some it is language, for others it is religion, kinship ties, residence, common history or political affiliation which form the basis of their identity in relation to other groups.\footnote{For a discussion of the problems arising from a mapping of Afghanistan's ethnic mosaic in view of the fluid and contextual nature of ethnic identities see Centlivres (1980) and Tapper (1988).} Moreover, ethnic identities can and do change. Ethnic identity is a cultural category, and since it is defined in the context of social interaction, it is a fluid and essentially historical and changeable phenomenon. So while a description of the main features of ethnic groups like the Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, Turkoman, Baluch and others and a mapping of their distribution provide some general insights, the limitations of such an exercise must also be recognised. It provides only a very rough approximation to the realities of ethnic identity and tells very little about inter-ethnic relations and thus of the political implications of ethnicity.

Afghanistan's history has profoundly shaped inter-ethnic relations. The Pashtuns are not only the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, but have also, as described earlier, been dominant since the formation of a Pashtun monarchy in the mid-eighteenth century. From the end of the nineteenth century and onwards, Pashtun dominance became extended and entrenched in relation to the other ethnic groups within the country. In connection with the consolidation and extension of state power during the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman (1880-1901), regions previously beyond the control of the Kabul government such as Hazarajat, Turkestan and Nuristan were incorporated into the realm, and various Pashtun tribes who had formerly possessed a large measure of independence were brought under increasing state control as well. Although many Pashtun tribal groups resisted the extension of state control, the Pashtun as an ethnic group were nevertheless the main beneficiaries of this process.
The policies of the central government at the end of the nineteenth century and later entailed the expansion of the Pashtuns beyond their traditional settlement areas in the East and South. Following the suppression of revolts in the southern and eastern part of the country, a portion of the subjugated Pashtun tribal groups were often forced to settle in the north where they were given land. Instead of being a potential source of revolt in an area where they were part of the majority, such groups now became dependent on the government as minorities in a different ethnic environment (Dupree 1973:419). At the same time the Amir encouraged voluntary settlement of Pashtun groups in the north where they too got access to land (Kakar 1979:131). Moreover, during the campaigns to subjugate the Hazaras under the rule of the central government, different groups of Pashtun nomads assisted the army, and were rewarded with grazing rights and trading opportunities in the Hazara highlands (Ferdinand 1962).

Although the Amir subjugated Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns alike, his policies had different implications for the Pashtuns compared with other ethnic groups, and this has defined the context of inter-ethnic relations right up till the present. As a result, the Pashtuns came to confront the other ethnic groups as the dominant and expanding force, as those who have penetrated their homelands and who moreover dominate trade and politics. To the members of other ethnic groups, the policies of nation-building pursued by the central government since then have appeared as a process of increasing ‘Pashtunization’, where non-Pashtuns were not able to compete on equal terms with the Pashtuns.

For this reason few of Afghanistan’s inhabitants, except part of its urban population, attach much positive value to their national identity as citizens of Afghanistan. For most non-Pashtuns the identity as Afghan has retained its original meaning as synonymous with Pashtun. To the non-Pashtuns the concept of a common nation (mellat) and homeland (votan) is difficult to reconcile with the fact that this nation has to a large extent been what its name implies, namely 'the land of the Pashtuns'.

Yet, despite the resentment by Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks and others of Pashtun dominance, this situation did not lead to the emergence of political organisations based on ethnic identity before the war. With one or possibly two exceptions, this has also not happened during the past 17 years of war. The reason is that inter-ethnic relations are not only influenced by the 'big' history at the national level but also by the many 'small' histories that are shaped at local level.
Organisational Continuities

The basic organisational framework for the population of Afghanistan's rural areas and for most of the inhabitants of its towns and cities as well is patrilineal kinship. The word qaum stands for all such groups in which membership is defined through common patrilineal descent whether real or putative. Thus, the term can be used to denote both the larger ethnic entities and sub-groups within these on different levels of inclusiveness, as well as religious sects, tribes, tribal segments and even the caste-like occupational groups found in parts of the rural areas. Since qaum can refer to more or less inclusive social entities, it provides scope for considerable situational flexibility regarding the scale of the groups that acquire practical importance for social action. However, even though people are aware of their membership of more inclusive social entities, it is their local qaum in the village or locality where they live which constitutes the framework that defines their main identity and allegiance. It is also the corresponding local area which is considered the votan to which one feels primarily attached.

Rural Afghanistan can be depicted as a patchwork of such qaum consisting of localised landowning descent groups representing different ethnic groups. Some areas contain a pronounced ethnic heterogeneity. Others, like the main Pashtun homeland in the East and South are more homogeneous, and here most of the local qaum are the sub-sections of more encompassing tribal entities. Even within individual villages or localities several different qaum may exist together, usually with one in the position as the dominant landholding kinship group and the others in various inferior positions as specialised craftsmen or tenants.

Irrespective of whether the region in question is ethnically heterogeneous or not, the relations between the different neighbouring qaum exhibit considerable variety. Local landowning qaum sharing the same, more inclusive, ethnic identity do not necessarily stand together as political allies vis-a-vis those sharing a different identity. Different local qaum sharing the same ethnic (or tribal) identity often confront each other as enemies due to disputes over land or other matters, and where this is the case they may seek allies among the members of local kinship groups belonging to other ethnic groups on the principle that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'.

Nor do individual local qaum always act as united political entities. Ideally, the kinsmen belonging to a specific local qaum should act jointly in relation to outsiders, but quite often this does not happen. Since inher-
itance of land and houses turn kinsmen into neighbours, innumerable possibilities exist for tension and conflict between them in a situation where cultivated land is everywhere a scarce resource. Other areas of social life such as the rivalry for leadership and prominence within the group also contain the potential of dispute. Such disputes are as frequent within a tribally organised group like the Pashtuns as they are within the non-tribal ethnic groups. Their likelihood is highlighted by the Pashtun term for patrilateral cousin, *tarbur*, which also has the connotation of 'enemy' or 'rival'. Where such conflicts cannot be contained, local landholding *qaum* are often split in rival factions (*gund*). Each of these will strive to establish alliances with other local landholding *qaum*, which may either be united or themselves be split in opposing factions. The result is that the patchwork of local *qaum* from different ethnic groups can become organised as opposing alliance networks which crosscut ethnic identities.

Since ethnic identities are established and acquire meaning in both local and supra-local contexts, their practical political implications are not something given. At one level the mutual perception of different ethnic groups has been shaped by their historical experience of the policies of Afghanistan's Pashtun rulers, on another by the actual relations that unite or divide different *qaum* on the local level. While the resentment resulting from the general historical experience of Pashtun dominance may colour the relations between Pashtuns and others, it does not determine their mutual relations just as this dominance does not provide for any axiomatic unity among the Pashtuns themselves. Instead, inter-ethnic relations are shaped by situational interests, which may both be influenced by concerns arising out of local conditions and by actors such as the state or political parties operating beyond the level of the local community or locality. The result is that political alignments vary considerably both between regions and over time within specific regions. The actual political alignments that are formed range from situations were the pattern of alliance and opposition cross-cuts ethnic divisions to situations where more encompassing coalitions of the members of a specific ethnic or *qaum* identity emerge.

This fluid and complex reality has been a constant feature of social and political life in Afghanistan. Neither the Communist regime nor the resistance have been able to change this. Both declared their intention to do away with inter-ethnic inequality and to replace ethnic identity with something else. For the Communists the alternative was a common national identity, for the resistance it was an Islamic one. Yet, in their pursuit of power, the policies of both have had to adapt to the existing cultural diversity defined by ethnicity and *qaum* in ways which largely negate their expressed ideologies.
Traditional Authority in Islam

Like qaum, religious belief also contains unifying as well as divisive elements. It provides a basic cultural unity insofar as it defines the ultimate frame of reference for social morality, rights and obligations. The importance of Islam as the basic cultural idiom has meant that the resistance struggle against the Communists and later the Soviet forces was conceptualised as a jehad in defence of the shared faith (din) against an opponent considered to be an infidel (kafir). It has also meant that religious authority has played a central role in the struggle. Yet, although nearly all of Afghanistan's population consider themselves members of the larger Muslim community or umma, this unity is overshadowed by the existence of different religious traditions and sectarian distinctions. Membership of a specific religious sect (mazhab) like Sunni or Shia is usually considered as one type of qaum identity, and these provide a more exclusive basis for social differentiation and political alignment than other forms of qaum identity (Canfield 1985:60). In addition, new interpretations of Islam advocated by some of the resistance parties have evolved which challenge both the old religious and political order as well as the communists. The result has been that Islam, or rather the use to which Islam has been put by those who claim the authority to interpret it, has in reality deepened instead of diminished the fragmentation of Afghan society.

In Afghanistan religious authority has traditionally derived from three principles: spiritual knowledge, sacred descent and mystical association (Edwards 1986:273). The first of these principles is embodied in the scholar (sing: alim, plural: ulama), who is trained in law and theology at an Islamic school (madrasa) according to an established curriculum. Such madrasa differ considerably regarding the quality of learning which they provide. The most prominent of their graduates are known as maulawi, and may themselves become madrasa teachers or judges. Among the more ordinary are the village mullah who leads the prayers in the local mosque, conducts the rituals connected with events such as birth, marriage and death, and teaches the children basic religious knowledge. The more prominent maulawi can achieve a certain spiritual authority both through the network of students (taliib) trained by them and through the sermons held at Friday prayers to the congregation. In contrast, most mullah did not possess much influence before the war. Their role was rather that of a community servant and, like occupational groups such as carpenters and blacksmiths, they too were paid by contributions from the community (Christensen 1980:82).
The most prestigious form of sacred descent is held by the *sayid* who are descendants of the Prophet. In addition, religious status is also derived from being the descendant of one of the companions of the Prophet or from persons who had achieved local religious prominence such as *akhunzada* or *mian*. Usually *sayid* and others of sacred descent do not constitute whole communities, but live in communities where the majority is constituted by other *qaum*. Here they have often been given land by the community where they reside. Their customary role has been that of spiritual teachers, mediators in local conflicts and magico-religious healers. The spiritual and thus secular influence of persons of sacred descent varies. Some have adopted an existence that can hardly be distinguished from that of ordinary landowners, while others are renowned for their piety and religious knowledge and have acquired a considerable following.

The third source of religious authority exists between a spiritual guide or master and his followers, where the master through teaching and example mediates access to the divine. This relationship has been institutionalised in the Sufi brotherhoods or sects (*tariqa*). The two most important in Afghanistan are the Naqshbandia headed by the Mujaddedi family and the Qadiriya headed by the Gailani family, while a third, the Chishtiya, has a more limited following (Utas 1981:326). Each Sufi *tariqa* is based on special rituals (*zikr*), and the status as leader or *pir* depends on full mastery of these. The closest followers who become disciples or *murid* and themselves master the rituals and knowledge can obtain the status of *khalifa* (deputy or successor) and either succeed the present *pir* or establish themselves elsewhere (Edwards 1986:278). However, the number of *murid* is usually limited, and most of the adherents (*mukhlis*) are not fully initiated but only participate in the *zikr* and receive spiritual guidance from the *pir* (Utas 1981:330). Ideally the *pir* should supervise the spiritual and moral development of his *mukhlis*, who are obliged to visit him regularly to demonstrate their loyalty and devotion (ibid). In addition to his involvement in rituals and spiritual guidance, a *pir* may also be involved in both healing and dispute settlement.

Thus, in practice the roles of prominent persons of sacred descent and the Sufi *pir* will be identical in many respects. Although the authority of the *sayid*, *akhunzada* and others is primarily derived from sacred patrilineal descent, while that of the Sufi *pir* is based on spiritual descent, the two are often fused, and prominent religious leaders normally combine all the three principles of authority (Edwards 1986:278). A leading *pir* is fre-
quently the patrilineal descendant of the founder of the *tariqa*, just as a *sayid* will not command more than token deference unless he has a reputation for piety and learning. Among the Shia the connection is even closer than among the Sunni, since religious authority is vested mainly in *sayid*, but graduated depending on the formal rank they have achieved through learning (Kopecky 1982:91).

Prominent religious leaders have large personal networks which link them to different groups in Afghan society. Although such networks vary considerably in extent, the followers of renowned leaders come from different social strata spanning rich and poor, urban and rural, farmers and nomads. These networks have been strengthened by ties of marriage linking the leading religious families with other members of the country's elite. Other relations also link the most prominent religious families to the secular elite, since members of these families have occupied positions in the state bureaucracy or the government itself.

These religious networks extend beyond Afghanistan to the wider world of Islam. Since their inception, the Sufi orders have been transnational organisations with networks of *pir* and followers among Sunni Muslims in many countries. Yet the system through which spiritual authority is transmitted from *pir* to *murid*, and the status of *khalifa* also means that the leadership within a Sufi order is not based on an encompassing hierarchy but is distributed among several persons. The Shia Muslims are likewise part of an international system. Thus, the spiritual head of the Ismaili Shia, the Agha Khan, resides outside Afghanistan and the Imami Shia have links with their fellow believers in Iran and Irak and attend the religious schools there. Since Afghanistan does not possess any institutions of higher religious learning, the Sunni Muslims have at least since the last century gone abroad for studies at places like Deoband in India and more recently the Al-Azhar in Cairo. At Deoband, to which most Afghans went, they were influenced by orthodox teachings which rejected Sufism. In addition, before 1978 minor *madrasa* in Pakistan like that at Panj Pir near Peshawar also attracted Afghan students to their more radical versions of Islam.

The economic basis for religious authority derives from several different sources comprising voluntary contributions from the faithful, the private wealth of the leaders, and religious endowments (*waqf*) (Ghani 1987:81). Some of the prominent families of religious authority were the trustees of *waqf* property donated by both the people and the rulers of Afghanistan for the upkeep of mosques, religious schools and shrines. Although the trusteeship of religious endowments became subject to
government approval and control during the rule of Amir Abdur Rahman, those in charge still retained considerable autonomy over the management of *waqf* property (Ibid:84). In addition, these families also controlled substantial personal wealth comprising land, livestock, urban property, and even export-import companies (Canfield 1985:61). However, the majority of the *ulama* did not control such wealth. In the towns the *ulama* were mostly depending on stipends or salaries paid by the government, while in the countryside most lived like the *mullah* from what they received in the form of gifts and tithes (*zakat*) from the believers. Throughout this century the *ulama* as a group have become increasingly dependent on the government as they became integrated in the state apparatus as judges and teachers, and as recruitment to such positions became limited to *ulama* trained at government *madrasa*. At the same time they have also become increasingly marginalised in both these fields. As the legal system became more secularised, university graduates replaced the *madrasa* trained *ulama*, and this was paralleled by developments in the educational sector (Roy 1985:46).

The *ulama* viewed this steady erosion of their influence together with other aspects of the process of modernisation, of which it formed part, with increasing resentment. However, with the exception of isolated instances such as the protests and demonstrations against the decision by Prime Minister Daoud (1953-63) in 1959 to permit women to move unveiled in public, there were few overt protests from the *ulama*. One reason was that the strength of the state apparatus and especially the army provided little scope for such protests. Another reason was that the essentially decentralised and ideologically heterogeneous nature of religious authority meant that the religious leadership could not emerge as a united political group. This in turn enabled successive governments before 1978, and even after the coup, to find religious scholars who were prepared to endorse their policies as being in accordance with Islam.

**The Islamic Resistance**

A growing Islamic opposition movement did emerge during the sixties and seventies, though partly outside the traditional institutional framework of religious authority. Kabul University and parliament became the principal arenas for this opposition and for its confrontations with the left (Ghani 1987:90). Nearly all of the principal figures, who
were later to head the different resistance parties were in one way or another involved in this Islamist opposition.48

During the parliamentary elections in 1965 and 1969 both the traditional religious leadership such as the Mujaddedi family and ordinary ulama obtained seats in the parliament as did the Communists (Dupree 1973:590). Among the ulama were Maulawi Nabi Muhammadi, who gained prominence during his confrontations with Babrak Karmal (Ghani 1987:91). The polarisation which was expressed in the parliament was paralleled by the increasing politisation of both teachers and students at the university.

Here, an Islamist movement originated among teachers at the Faculty of Theology, who during their education at the Al-Azhar University had been influenced by the radical ideology of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.49 Among these were Burhanuddin Rabbani, who became its leader, as well as Abdul Rasul Sayyaf and Sibghatullah Mujaddedi. This group, in which Mujaddedi seems to have been somewhat marginal due to his Sufi background, exerted considerable influence on the students through teaching and translation of radical Islamic literature from abroad. This included the works of the chief Islamist thinker in Egypt, Sayyad Qotub, and his Pakistani counterpart, Abdul Ala Maududi. During the sixties, when a free press was tolerated, the movement published the newspaper Gahez (Dawn). A regular contributor to this was Maulawi Yonus Khales, who after studies in India and Pakistan taught at a madrasa in his native Nangarhar province.

While the Jamiat had mainly concentrated on cultural and ideological activities, an Islamist student movement calling itself the Muslim Youth (Jawanan-e Musulman) was formed in the mid-sixties for overt political action and mobilisation of the students. Among its members were the engineering students Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Ahmad Shah Masoud. The period between 1965 and 1972 was one of agitation directed against both the Afghan monarchy and foreign influence in Afghanistan whether by the Soviet Union or the West. The Islamists also opposed the nationalist ideology of the establishment and instead advocated a pan-Isl-

48) As argued by Roy (1985:3 & 6) the term 'Islamist' is to be preferred to that of 'fundamentalist'. For the fundamentalists the objective is to return to some former state by getting back to the true meaning of the sacred scriptures. For the Islamists the objective is rather to create from Islam a political model capable of reconstructing society and competing with the ideologies of the Western world.

49) According to Roy (1985:70) the movement was called the Jamiat-e Islami (Islamic Society), but other sources refer to it as the Ikhwan ul-Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) (Klass 1987:400).
Islamic concept of the *umma*. While initially weaker than the Communists, the influence of the Islamists steadily increased, and in the elections to the student council at the university in 1970, they gained the majority (Roy 1985:71).

The Islamist movement represented a new phenomenon in Afghan politics. Like their opponents on the left, the Islamists are mainly the creation of the radicalisation which took place among sections of the intelligentsia and urban middle class from the sixties onwards as a reaction to their frustrated aspirations regarding employment opportunities, political influence and the development of the country. Thus, radical Islam and communism resemble each other insofar as they are alternative and opposed ideological solutions to the same social problems with a following largely drawn from the same social groups. Both want a revolutionary transformation of society and both see the seizure of state power as a precondition for this. As was the case with the communists, the predominantly urban constituency and radical, uncompromising ideology of the Islamists limited their appeal to the rural population, and only after the coup in 1978 did they achieve a following outside the environment in which they had originated.

This lack of organisational reach outside the cities was demonstrated by the failed Islamist rebellion in 1975. In 1973 Daoud returned to power.
through a coup with the support of the army and the *Parcham* communist faction. The hostility of Daoud and his *Parcham* allies towards the Muslim opposition drove most of the prominent Islamists as well as the more vocal representatives of the traditionalist religious leadership such as Mujaddedi into exile. The Islamists went to Peshawar where they received support from Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1973-77), not because of any ideological sympathies, but because he intended to use the Islamists to counter the interference by Daoud in the Pashtun areas of Pakistan (Roy 1985:75). A rebellion was planned to take place in different areas with Masoud in charge of Panjshir, Hekmatyar of Paktia and other young Islamists elsewhere. In many places the rebellion never got off the ground and where it did there was no popular support. It was quickly repressed and followed by arrests of those Islamists that the Daoud regime could lay its hands on (ibid). Attempts by other Islamists to incite the population against the regime, such as those by the Wahabi inspired *mullah* Jamil ur-Rahman in Kunar during the late seventies were equally unsuccessful (Christensen 1988:14).

In the aftermath of the failed rebellion of 1975 the Islamist movement broke up due to a mixture of personal, ethnic and political factors. A new break-away party, the *Hizb-e Islami* (Islamic Party) was established by Hekmatyar, who is a Pashtun, while Rabbani, a Tajik, retained the leadership of what was left of the *Jamiat-e Islami*. Later a second division occurred when Khales, also a Pashtun, but from a different area and tribe, split with Hekmatyar and became the leader of another *Hizb-e Islami*. Thus, when the communist coup took place in 1978, the Islamists were weakened by internal quarrels and organisational fragmentation.

Unlike those resistance groups which relied on traditional forms of authority, the subsequent role of the Islamists in the resistance did not grow directly from their spiritual and organisational links with the Afghan people. Apart from the strength they derived from their ideologically motivated following consisting of students, university graduates and young *ulama*, three factors seem to have been crucial for their prominent position within the resistance. The first of these is the legitimacy as champions of Islam gained by the Islamists through their early involvement in the struggle against the new communist regime. Although the struggle in

---

50) It may be more than an interesting coincidence that the present Pakistani minister of interior, Nasrullah Babar, who lately - as described in the following chapter - appears to be shaping Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan, was at that time governor of the NWFP and alleged to be actively involved in the support for the Afghan Islamists (*Asiaweek*, 6 January, 1995, p.25).
most cases began as isolated instances of rebellion by local populations against acts of oppression and interference by the new powerholders, the Islamists were quick to join in and portray the struggle as a *jehad* in defence of Islam.\(^{51}\) Secondly, both before but especially during their exile in Pakistan, the Afghan Islamists had established close relations with like-minded movements there, most notably the *Jamaat-e Islami* founded by Maududi and the *Jamiat-e Ulama-e Islam*. Thus, the Islamists had strong advocates with good links to president Zia ul-Haq, who was personally supportive of both Islamist ideology and the Afghan *jehad*. The result was that the three Islamist parties were among the six (later seven) Afghan parties which were selected among the multitude of Afghan opposition groups and given official recognition by the Pakistani authorities; this enabled them to open offices and conduct political activities among the Afghan refugees. Thirdly, the official recognition meant that these parties became the only recipients of the military, financial and humanitarian assistance provided through official channels. Since the bulk of this assistance seems to have been given to the Islamist parties, and in particular to the *Hizb-e Islami* of Hekmatyar, their control over the crucial resources required to fight the war helped them to achieve a dominant position within the resistance movement.

The main parties (*tanzim*) of the Sunni resistance can be grouped in two broad categories in terms of their organisational character and ideology. The first category consists of those parties that have evolved from traditional religious forms of organisation like the Sufi *tariqa*. Thus, Sibghatullah Mujaddedi and other members of the Mujaddedi family heading the Naqshbandia order are now the leaders of the *Jabha-e Nejat-e Melli* (National Liberation Front). Similarly, the head of the Qadiriya order Sayyid Ahmad Gailani now leads the *Mahaz-e Melli-e Islam* (National Islamic Front). The members of each of these parties are largely drawn from the religious followers of the *tariqa* from which the party has evolved. Since both have a considerable following among Pashtun in the East, this is also the area where they are most influential. A third party, the *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islam* (Islamic Revolutionary Front) is headed by Maulawi Nabi Mohammadi, who has utilised the madrasa network to mobilise a following mainly among mullah and talib in the Pashtun East and South. Common to these parties is a looser organisation compared with the Is-

---

51) The term *jehad*, which is derived from Arabic, can have several meanings. As used by the Afghan resistance it means “to exert one’s utmost endeavour in promoting the cause of Islam”. The term can also be used to describe the effort for moral improvement whether on a personal or social level (Shahrani 1984:28).
lamists. Although all three seek the establishment of an Islamic state, the conception of what this should be remains vague. The return of the former king, Zahir Shah, has at one time or another been advocated by all three parties, and most consistently by Gailani who had close personal as well as family relations with the king.

The second category consists of the three Islamist organisations described above, plus a fourth, the *Ittehad-e Islami* (Islamic Unity), established by Sayyaf after he appropriated the inter-party alliance of the same name as his personal party in 1980. These parties see themselves as participants of a broader revolutionary movement within the Muslim umma, where the fight against the communists and the Soviets has been but one step towards a transformation of society. They consider the non-Islamist parties, and in particular those with a Sufi background, as ideologically tainted. At the same time they regard the leaders of these parties as sharing the responsibility for the present situation in Afghanistan because of their former association with the monarchy, whose policies the Islamists view as excessively liberal, corrupt and socially unjust. Although Rabbani's Tajik background has meant that the stronghold of *Jamiat* support is in the Tajik areas north of Kabul, the party also has a following among the members of other ethnic groups including Pashtuns elsewhere in the country. This is also the case with Hekmatyar's *Hizb-e Islami*, which though Pashtun draws its followers from most of the Sunni Muslim groups including Tajiks and Uzbeks. In contrast the followers of the two other Pashtun leaders, Khales and Sayyaf, are mainly to be found among Pashtun in the east and south.

The political divisions among the Shia Hazara resemble those among the Sunni in the sense that they run along lines defined by adherence either to traditional spiritual and secular authorities or to revolutionary Islamist ideology. This internal fragmentation is further deepened by different perceptions of regional autonomy advocated by some of the parties. To a varying extent, the Shia parties have been ideologically oriented towards Iran from where they have also received whatever external assistance that has been provided. Although Hazarajat was largely left to itself during the period of resistance struggle and Soviet occupation, extensive fighting has taken place among its different political groups (Cf. Grevemeyer 1988). For periods the Sunni parties in the traditionalist and Islamist category have each formed loose coalitions, at other times they have formed alliances across apparent ideological boundaries which separate them. While no individual party seems to have a following comprising both Sunni or Shia, alliances have from time to time been formed across sectarian lines.
between Sunni and Shia parties. These fluid relations between the parties reflect the fact that situational interests seem to determine their policies as much as politico-religious ideology. In this respect they resemble the arena of *qaum* in which they have to operate and which their operations in turn have influenced.

**Local Political Leadership: Khan and Commandan**

Local leadership and the rivalry for leadership is what articulates the *qaum* or *gund* (faction) with external actors operating beyond the level of the local community such as the state or more recently the different resistance parties. A Pashtun saying states that "the leader is he who has the capacity for leadership". This saying highlights three central features of leadership (*mashertob*) which are not exclusive to the Pashtuns, but are shared throughout Afghan society: it is personal, it is often achieved and even where it has been ascribed it still has to be actively maintained, and it leaves room for considerable social mobility (Christensen 1991:176).

In Afghan rural society leadership is personal in a double sense. Firstly because it depends on the personal qualities and capacity of the leader, and secondly because it is founded on a network of personal relations between the leader and his followers and allies. The personalised nature of leadership makes it uncertain and, even where the position as leader (*khan*) has been inherited, it is not something given, but has to be actively upheld. This is because, conferring as it does a highly coveted status on the person who performs it, the leadership role is always contested by others. These others, who may constitute potential or actual rivals, range from close kin such as brothers and cousins, over more distant kin from the same local descent group, to persons belonging to other descent groups. Where the contestants for leadership are close relatives, the result can be that local kinship groups are split in rival factions. Irrespective of whether the kinship group remains united or is split, the position of leadership invariably requires a continuous effort to maintain and enlarge influence and control in competition with rivals leaders at the local level. In order to attract followers and supporters, a leader has to strive for control over resources and income, and in order to facilitate and ensure control over wealth he has to maintain a considerable political following.

In rural Afghanistan landownership is a main source of influence, and before the war local leaders were mainly to be found among the larger
landowners within a particular area. Since the extent of land concentration varied considerably between and even within different regions, the extent of influence wielded by individual leaders also differed. In areas featuring large landholdings and pronounced economic inequality leadership was based on patron-client relations. A leader (khan) functioned as a patron by establishing different types of relationships with his clients and followers. Such relationships would include the provision of land in tenancy, hospitality and assistance of various kinds. His clients and followers in return provided him with political (and occasionally also military) support vis-a-vis his rivals. In areas with a more egalitarian structure of landownership where clientage did not play the same role, a leader (masher) was a spokesman or representative, rather than a patron, and derived his role from his personal qualities, experience and oratory skills.

The intense rivalry for leadership means, on the one hand, that it inevitably involves the attempt to dominate others and, on the other hand, that such dominance rarely becomes outright oppression on a large scale. The personal and unstable character of leadership corresponds to the equally unstable and floating composition of the following of a leader. Therefore, if a leader relies too much on oppression (zulm) to increase his influence, he will acquire a bad reputation and his clients and followers will be likely to desert him and rally behind one of his local rivals instead. While the ability to terminate such a relationship may be restricted for some people such as the tenants of a big landowner, it is nevertheless always open to many of those who constitute the following of a particular leader. So while leadership may involve acts of oppression, it cannot rely entirely on this, and successful leadership in fact requires rather the opposite: it involves the ability to accommodate and further the interests of actual and potential followers.

This kind of political organisation does not readily lend itself to external control. At the same time, states have been a feature of the political landscape of Afghanistan for millennia, and while rural communities have resisted intrusive attempts by the state where this involved measures like taxation or conscription, they have also strived to utilize the power of the state for their own ends.

The nature of local political leadership introduces a certain ambiguity in the relationship between the local community and the central government which gives shape to the articulation between local and supra-local levels of political organisation. While local leaders will resist any intervention by the central government which is likely to limit their influence, the intense competition for local dominance makes the state a useful
ally and a resource in the context of local political rivalry. The most important mechanism to achieve this is for a local leader to establish himself as a **middleman** between his followers and the centre or its representatives on the provincial level. This provides the leader in question with an advantage in relation to local political rivals. He will be in a better position to accommodate the interests of his followers in their dealings with the government, to draw on the power of the state to facilitate control over scarce resources such as land, and in more recent times also to influence the use of government resources for development in his area. For the centre such relations provide an avenue for exercising influence over the local communities by making the continued influence of selected local leaders dependent on government support.

Over the centuries government patronage has played a significant role in the creation of local elites in the rural areas. The frequent political upheavals and changes which have taken place in Kabul have been accompanied by corresponding shifts in the alignments between the state and local leaders in the countryside. Following such changes in the capital, the leaders most closely associated with the former regime have often been discarded as allies by the new powerholders. Instead they have favoured and promoted new constellations of rising local leaders, often consisting of the rivals of the formerly dominant ones. One example of such a change took place when Nadir Shah assumed power in 1929 and began favouring other local leaders than those who had been allied with his predecessor, Amanullah (Christensen 1982:42). As such, while the pattern of local leadership and the structure of relations between such leaders and the state has endured over a fairly long period, the composition of the rural elite has been subject to changes.

Following the coup d’état in 1978 and the emergence of widespread popular resistance, these relations between local leaders and the state apparatus were widely disrupted. Prominent local leaders who had been associated with the former regimes of Zahir Shah and Daoud were persecuted, and many were jailed, executed or driven into exile. At the same time the Kabul regime went to great lengths to reestablish such relations with other local leaders during the years of war. Since the regime did not have anything resembling a mass following or an organisational basis in the countryside, its only means of control apart from military repression was to try to establish a network of alliances with local leaders along basically the same lines as previous rulers had done. As the rebellion against the new regime developed, some of the leaders who supported it were given arms and money to form militias to help contain the resistance. The mi-
litias were exempted from certain government programmes like the land reforms, from conscription to the army, and were usually left with considerable autonomy in the area they controlled. During the war mujahedden commanders became militia leaders and vice versa. The two largest and most well-established militias that emerged were that among the Uzbeks under the leadership of Rashid Dostam and the Ismaili Shia militia headed by their religious leader, Sayyid Jaffer Naderi.

Like the communist regime, the resistance also had an impact on the pattern of local leadership in the countryside. The principal new leadership role created by the war was that of the resistance leader - the commander. That this role is indeed a new one in the context of Afghan political organisation is highlighted by the term used for it by both Pashtu and Persian speakers, namely qommandan - an Afghan rendering of the English word commander - instead of traditional leadership designations such as khan or malik. In many cases the resistance commanders have superseded those who held influence before the war, although it would appear that this has not happened as widely as it is often believed. There are also commanders who were influential before the war or who come from one of the leading families in the area where they now operate. But the fact remains that new leaders have emerged who have achieved influence through the resistance struggle as mujahedden commanders, and who represent both a new generation of leaders and new social groups. The vacuum left by the persecution by the Communist regime of the pre-war rural leadership and the qualities required of leadership in the resistance struggle have enabled the emergence of these new leaders. Many have a social background that might not have permitted them to become prominent under pre-war conditions. Significant among these new leaders are the many persons with a professional background or at least a partly completed higher education, as is evidenced by the frequent use of titles such as engineer, doxar or moalem (teacher) added to the names of commanders. The role of Islam as the overarching ideology of the resistance has also enabled ordinary village mullah to assume positions of leadership.

The role of the commander resembles that of the pre-war local leader, the khan, in basic respects. As is the case with the khan, the position of the commander is founded on personal qualities but the element of achievement plays an even greater role than was the case for most khan. The commander’s position, like that of the khan, is highly coveted and,

52) Like qommandan both khan and malik are loanwords, khan from Mongolian and malik from Arabic. The only indigenous Pashto term for leader is that of masher, which has the meaning of elder.
since it has been achieved in a social environment open to more contestants than was the case with local leadership positions before the war, it has to be constantly guarded against rivals.

Moreover, as was the case with local leadership in pre-war Afghanistan, the influence of the *mujaheddin* commander is likewise strengthened by his ability to assume the role as a middleman in relation to supra-local levels of organisation. During the struggle against the Soviet occupation forces and the communist regime in Kabul, the most important of these levels of supra-local organisation was constituted by the Afghan resistance parties. They were the ones who controlled the access to resources in the form of arms, medical assistance, money etc. which were needed by the resistance groups in Afghanistan.

At the same time the resistance parties can also be seen to have performed in the role of middlemen but on a higher level of organisation. Their access to the resources required for the resistance struggle depended on their relations with foreign donors. Apart from the ideologically motivated backing from individual *mujaheddin* commanders, the following in Afghanistan of the different resistance parties was and is also crucially influenced by their ability to accommodate the requirements of the commanders who seek their assistance.

Yet, while the role as a middleman or broker who uses this position to create a following though patronage is something common to both the *khan* and the commander, the importance of this role nevertheless differs significantly for the two types of leaders. Before the war a local leader exercised influence over his clients and followers as a result both of his direct personal control over land, and possibly other sources of income, and as a middleman in relation to the state, which could provide resources or services. Now many if not most commanders are primarily dependent on their ability to assume the role as middlemen in order to obtain the crucial resources which will enable them to maintain their following of *mujaheddin*. To a certain extent this dependence on outside resources is a direct result of the disruption of agriculture and the dislocation of population caused by the war. In many areas these conditions have forced commanders, who might otherwise draw on the land they or their family own, to rely on outside sources of funding. But the dependence is also partly the result of the social changes which have taken place with regard to local leadership, since many of the commanders of more humble social background do not have access to resources of their own.

This necessity for most commanders to assume the role as middlemen in relation to external allies and donors has been a significant factor
which has contributed to the unstable and floating allegiance to the resistance parties based in Pakistan or Iran. While some of the commanders who follow one or the other of the resistance parties do so because of a shared ideology, many others appear to have joined a particular party because of more mundane and pragmatic considerations. Their allegiance to a particular party is dependent on whether they can obtain the resources they require and maintain their following of mujaheddin in competition with rival commanders in the same area. Many commanders are therefore members of more than one party at the same time. Over the years several commanders have also shifted their allegiance between different parties, some even several times. When asked about the reasons for this, the answer is frequently similar to the statement of a commander in Kunar who, in 1991, changed his allegiance from the Hizb-e Islami to the Salafi, and who has since then changed back to the Hizb: “I have to feed my mujaheddin".

Following the collapse of the Najibullah government and the decline in external support for most if not all of the former resistance parties, many local commanders have been facing increasing difficulties in obtaining the resources necessary to feed their mujaheddin. This has had several consequences. First of all, some commanders have simply lost their previous influence as their following faded away when the access to external resources disappeared. Secondly, other external sources such as the assistance provided by aid agencies for reconstruction or relief have acquired an increasingly important role as a political resource in the competition for influence and leadership. Thirdly, some commanders have turned to looting, banditry and extortion of travellers and traders to obtain the funds necessary to maintain their position. Fourthly, although it has not happened on a wide scale, in an attempt to establish control over resources which make them less dependent on external donors, there are commanders in some areas who have taken over land vacated by either refugees now in Pakistan, or by people claimed to be supporters of the Communist regime. Finally, and most importantly, despite such incidents there has been a discernible shift in the overall distribution of power and influence on the local level from the commanders and back to the ‘traditional’ khan and masher. With the return of refugees to many areas and the reestablishment of agriculture, land has regained its former importance as

---

53) Afghan followers of the Wahabi version of Islam prefer to call themselves Salafi. The term is derived from the Arabic word salaf, which means 'men reputed for their piety and faith in past generations', and the Salafi are those who follow the example of such ancestors.
the basis for local political influence. Whether this process will eventually contribute to more peaceful conditions in the rural areas remains to be seen. In many instances the return of the refugees and the recovery of the agricultural economy has been accompanied by the resumption of old conflicts primarily over land. Yet the fact that, at least until the emergence of the *Taliban*, the population in most of Afghanistan's rural areas has kept aloof from the current power struggle in Kabul may indicate that people's primary concerns and interests are defined by the conditions that affect their local *qaum* and *votan*, as was also the case before the war.

**The *Taliban*: Change and Continuity**

The recent political success of the movement that has become known as the *Taliban* (religious students) appears to have been fuelled by the increasing opposition to the commanders in both rural areas and the towns. When the *Taliban* emerged in Kandahar province in July 1994, it was as a reaction against the lawlessness, oppression and mutual rivalry of the dominant commanders in the area. Sparked by popular outrage over an incident where a commander had abducted, raped and killed three women, a local *mullah* and former *mujahed*, Mohammad Omar, mobilised a group of *madrasa* students (*taliban*), who attacked and killed the commander, and were then joined by his *mujaheddin*. This incident now constitutes the myth of the origin of the *Taliban* and sums up some of the central features of the movement.

The *Taliban* are Sunni and primarily Pashtun, and the ideology of their leaders seems to embody a rigid version of village Islam. The core of the movement is village clergy and religious students, many of whom have a past as *mujaheddin* with different parties, but who returned to the mosque and *madrasa* after the collapse of the Kabul regime. Like the *Harakat of Maulawi* Nabi Mohammadi, their organisational hinterland is the *madrasa* network. During the rule of Zia-ul Haq, *madrasa* for Afghan refugees and Pakistanis alike mushroomed in the NWFP and Baluchistan. Both in the refugee camps and in Afghanistan the *madrasa* found a fertile recruiting ground for religious as well as more pragmatic reasons. By sending a son to the *madrasa*, a poor family would ensure that he was fed, clothed and sheltered free of charge, and that he received an education which might later provide him with a job in a mosque or *madrasa*.⁵⁴ The

funding came both from the Pakistani government and from international donors including the Saudis, the Gulf countries and Libya.\textsuperscript{55} Especially the two factions of the \textit{Jamiat-e Ulama-e Islam}, which already had established networks of mosques and \textit{madrasa}, were able to benefit from this, but many \textit{madrasa} were sponsored and run by other organisations as well.\textsuperscript{56} Even during the resistance struggle, \textit{madrasa} had been established inside Afghanistan, and their number seems to have increased considerably since the collapse of the Communist regime.\textsuperscript{57} As the \textit{Taliban} movement gathered momentum, volunteers have joined from \textit{madrasa} run by a variety of different religious organisations both in Afghanistan and among the refugees in Pakistan. Hence, the followers of the \textit{Taliban} movement cannot be regarded as a unified ideological force but have been influenced by many different versions of Islam.

The \textit{Taliban} have stated that their aim is “. . . to cleanse Afghanistan of those who have become killers, thieves and robbers in the name of Islam. We want to restore peace and ensure an end to looting, dishonouring of out women, and lawlessness”.\textsuperscript{58} The opposition by the \textit{Taliban} to the misrule of the resistance parties has ensured them widespread support from a population that has become increasingly disillusioned with the \textit{mujaheddin}. At the same time, many commanders, motivated either by dissatisfaction with their leaders or fear that they might share the fate of those who were overrun and ousted by the \textit{Taliban}, have rallied behind them. Such recruits have come from all of the former Sunni resistance parties but most notably from the \textit{Harakat} of Mohamadi.\textsuperscript{59} The weapons brought along by these \textit{mujaheddin} and those captured from other commanders or confiscated from the population in the areas they control have provided the armaments of the movement, together with such arms that the \textit{Taliban} may have received from external donors. The \textit{Taliban} are estimated to wield a force comprising around 25,000 men supported by more than 200 tanks and even aircraft.\textsuperscript{60} To preserve this fighting force and prevent the religious students from returning to their studies, the \textit{Taliban} leadership

\textsuperscript{56}) \textit{The News}, 5 April 1995.
\textsuperscript{57}) According to the former chief of the Pakistani army staff, Aslam Beg, the Pakistanis began as early as 1985-86 to support \textit{madrasa} for orphans in Afghanistan to create a future cadre for the \textit{jehad} (\textit{The News}, 3 March 1995). In the areas to which the refugees returned from 1992 onwards, the establishment of new \textit{madrasa} with support from different donors was a common phenomenon.
\textsuperscript{58}) \textit{The News}, 11 December 1994.
\textsuperscript{59}) \textit{Nation}, 1 March 1995.
\textsuperscript{60}) \textit{Financial Times}, 21 February 1995.
have taken steps to ensure that the *madrasa* for Afghan refugees in Pakistan are closed down until what they consider to be a true Islamic system has been introduced in Afghanistan.\(^6\)

While the *Taliban* represent a new phenomenon on the political scene, they also embody a continuation of existing ideological orientations and organisational patterns. Like village *ulama* in the Sunni *Harakat* and other resistance parties, the leaders of the *Taliban* have made a similar transition from heading *madrasa* and mosques to become political and military leaders comparable to *mujaheddin* commanders. Like those they oppose in the former resistance parties, they have also had to accommodate their policies to the realities of *qaum* and factionalism. While they have deprived many *mujaheddin* commanders of their former position, they have also established alliances with commanders who defected from other parties. And, like their adversaries, they have not hesitated to increase their strength by drawing on civil administrators and military personnel from the former regime.

The Political Economy of War

The Fragmentation of Afghanistan

On 25 April 1992, almost precisely 14 years after the Communist coup, mujaheddin forces entered Kabul. However, their entry into Kabul was not based on a military victory over the forces of President Najibullah but on the collapse of the Kabul regime following in the wake of that of the Soviet Union.

In the three years that had passed since the completion of the Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan on 15 February 1989, the Kabul regime had largely managed to hold its own against the resistance. Only the two isolated towns of Terin Kot in Uruzgan and Khost in Paktia had been conquered militarily by mujaheddin forces. The assault on Jalalabad in March 1989, which was undertaken to provide the newly-formed Afghan government-in-exile with a territorial base, was repulsed partly due to the inability of the anti-communist groupings to coordinate their forces during the attack.

Repeated attempts to form alliances among the resistance parties during the eighties had never brought any real unity, and their mutual relations remained strained to the point of occasional armed clashes throughout the period of Soviet occupation. As the date for the completion of the Soviet military withdrawal approached, the need arose to provide the resistance with a semblance of unity that would enable it to take power following the expected collapse of the Kabul regime. The seven Sunni parties were pressured by Pakistan and the USA into convening a shura in February 1989 to choose an interim government before the completion of the Soviet troop withdrawal. However, this shura did not succeed in creating a broad based government. Instead it deepened the conflicts between the various resistance groupings and prepared the ground for the power struggle and fragmentation of Afghanistan that followed the mujaheddin takeover. Thus, Iran strongly supported the Shia claim for a strong representation in the shura but the Saudis, who were opposed to
Iranian influence in Afghanistan, paid off various of the Sunni leaders to prevent this (Rubin 1989/90:155). These leaders also excluded virtually everybody else including most of the commanders inside Afghanistan and the supporters of the ex-king Zahir Shah. Nor did the seven Sunni parties agree among themselves, and due to the Pashtun dominance Rabbani got a relatively insignificant position when the Afghan Interim Government (AIG) was finally formed.

The Kabul regime only fell when the massive military and financial support from the former Soviet Union ceased towards the end of 1991. Without this assistance the Kabul regime was no longer able to fund the militias on which much of its power had rested. In January 1992 conflicts developed between the Kabul regime and the Uzbek and Ismaili militias. They entered into an alliance with the Jamiat commander, Ahmad Shah Masoud, and in March 1992 their combined forces took control of the important town of Mazar-i Sharif in the north. Following this event, president Najibullah announced his willingness to step down and his regime began to disintegrate.

Within a few weeks, the former conflict between communists and the resistance was replaced by a new pattern of alliances founded on the older and more enduring divisions of qaum and patronage within both the regime and the opposition. Both in Kabul and in the provinces new rival coalitions were established comprising various combinations of mujahed-din commanders, army units and militia. In the capital, the Tajiks from the Parcham faction of the former regime sided with the Jamiat, whereas the Pashtuns from the Khalq faction allied themselves with Hekmatyar’s Hizb-e Islami. These new coalitions confronted each other when Masoud moved into Kabul on the 25th of April and drove out the forces of Hekmatyar, which were advancing from the south.

Even before Sibghatullah Mujaddedi entered the city on 28 April as the first interim president chosen by the resistance a few days earlier in Peshawar, the scene was set for the power struggle which since then has destroyed much of Kabul. Although Mujaddedi tried to mobilise support among tribal and religious leaders to extend his tenure beyond the two months agreed upon in the Peshawar Accords, he did not succeed and power was transferred to Rabbani as scheduled. For the first time since the rebellion by Bacha-i Saqao against King Amanullah in 1929, a Tajik ruled in Kabul.

During the summer of 1992, Hekmatyar tried to mobilise the Pashtuns against this alleged attempt by the Tajiks to deprive them of their former supremacy. Despite the widespread Pashtun resentment that exist-
ed against Rabbani, the appeal found little response. While this may partly be a reflection of Hekmatyar’s own standing among the Pashtuns, it also clearly demonstrated the limitations of ethnic identity as a unifying force in Afghan politics. As before, the situational interests defined by the local patterns of opposition and alliance prevailed over those defined in terms of larger ethnic identities.

Thus, when Rabbani and Masoud moved to consolidate their control over Kabul, they clashed with the recently formed coalition comprising some of the Shia parties, the *Hizb-e Wahdat* (Unity Party), which has its supporters among the Hazaras in the western part of the city. The *Hizb-e Wahdat* was at the same time involved in conflicts over territorial control in Kabul with fellow Shia Hazara from the *Harakat-e Islami* of Mohseni, and with the Saudi supported *Ettehad-e Islami* of Sayyaf based in Paghman further to the west. The seemingly baffling alliance between the predominantly Pashtun *Hizb-e Islami* of Hekmatyar and the Hazara *Hizb-e Wahdat* on the one hand, and the largely Tajik *Jamiat*, the Pashtun *Ettehad*, and the Shia Hazara *Harakat* on the other therefore reflects a struggle for local territorial control and personal influence rather than any larger political or ideological issues. While each of the political entities within these coalitions are based on relations defined in terms of *qaum* and patronage, their mutual relations seem to derive entirely from their situational interests. Thus, with the *mujaheddin* takeover, the politics of the village imposed themselves on the political scene of the country’s capital.

Repeated attempts such as the Islamabad Accords from March 1993 and the Jalalabad Accords from May 1993 to reach an agreement on the formation of a government have been futile. So have the efforts to mediate, whether by leaders from other parts of Afghanistan or from outsiders such as Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Conference Organisation or the UN. The compromise reached in Islamabad in March 1993 to divide authority between Rabbani as president and Hekmatyar as prime minister never worked.

Heavy fighting engulfed Kabul once again on 1 January 1994 and continued throughout the year. It involved a partial re-shuffling of the previous alliance pattern, which once again demonstrated that the distinc-

---

62) Since April 1994, a special envoy of the UN general secretary, the Tunisian foreign minister Mahmoud Mestiri, has been trying to establish a negotiated settlement between the warring factions. This effort has not yielded any results so far. The refusal of the *Taliban* to join the proposed transitional council, their advance on Kabul in March and the fighting with both the Shia *Hizb-e Wahdat* and the forces of Rabbani seem to have jeopardized the UN peace process.
tions between mujaheddin and communist, Islamist and traditionalist, Pashtun and non-Pashtun are of little consequence. Due to conflicts along the border between their respective domains in the north, relations between Masoud and Dostam had become increasingly tense during 1993. Although Hekmatyar had earlier described Dostam as an enemy of the Islamic revolution, he wasted little time in turning his former enemy into an ally. Nor did the previous denunciation by Mujaddedi of Hekmatyar now prevent the two from uniting. Thus the coalitions which confronted each other in the struggle for Kabul until the emergence of the Taliban consisted of the followers of Hekmatyar, Dostam, Mujaddedi and the Hizb-e Wahdat on the one hand, and those of Rabbani, Masoud, Sayyaf, Nabi Mohammadi’s Sunni Harakat and Mohseni’s Shia Harakat on the other.63 Within each coalition the groups that constitute them are to a varying extent allied with elements of the former regime.

The sudden emergence of the Taliban movement in the autumn of 1994 has radically changed this picture. Within a period of six months, starting with the capture of a major Hizb-e Islami arms depot in the border town of Spin Boldak on 13 October 1994, and until they reached Kabul in early March 1995, the Taliban had established control over ten provinces in the east and south.64 On 10 February the Taliban took the Hizb stronghold of Maidan Shahr in Wardak, and on the 14th they captured Hekmatyar’s headquarters in Charasyab south of Kabul. Faced with the risk of being caught between the Taliban and Rabbani’s forces, and with the reported unwillingness to fight the Taliban by his own mujaheddin, Hekmatyar fled to Sarobi, a village which controls the Kabul-Jalalabad highway. Thus, within a few days, one of the major players in the struggle for Kabul had been marginalised.

The removal of Hizb-e Islami provided the forces of Rabbani and Masoud with an opportunity to eliminate the last remaining opposition forces in Kabul, the Shia Hizb-Wahdat. On 6 March, Rabbani’s forces attacked and, after suffering heavy casualties the Wahdat leader Abdul Ali Mazari turned to the Taliban for assistance. However, when the Taliban began to disarm the Wahdat mujaheddin, clashes broke out between them. Mazari together with some of his lieutenants were taken prisoner by the Taliban and later died under mysterious circumstances. By 20 March the forces of the Rabbani government had pushed the Taliban out of Kabul

63) The leadership of the anti-Rabbani alliance calls itself the ‘Supreme Coordinating Council of the Islamic Revolution of Afghanistan’.
64) These ten provinces are Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, Uruzgan, Paktika, Paktia, Ghazni, Logar, Wardak and Nimruz.
and established a new frontline, which for the first time in more than two years made the city safe from rocket attacks.

The Taliban meanwhile also moved westwards into the areas controlled by the Jamiat commander Ismail Khan. On 11 March, Ismail Khan’s forces had to abandon Dilaram in the south of the Farah province to the Taliban and withdraw to defend the important airbase of Shindand, where they have been reinforced by troops from Kabul.\(^6^5\) Thus, it would appear that the opposition from seasoned and organised military forces have finally halted the rapid Taliban advance. Until then, their remarkable political and military success had both rested on the weakness of the military opposition they encountered and on the genuine popularity and moral prestige they enjoyed among a population longing for peace and stability. Yet the attempt to conquer the domain of Ismail Khan, which already possesses the peace and stability that the Taliban vow to introduce, has tarnished their moral image.

The rapid advance of the Taliban has weakened not only the Hizb-e Wahdat and the Hizb-e Islami of Hekmatyar, but most of the other resistance parties as well. Many mujaheddin commanders have defected to the Taliban, and those who opposed their advance have been killed or driven into exile.\(^6^6\) Others like Qari Baba, the governor of Ghazni, have been forced to resign and withdraw to a sort of house arrest. Next to the Hizb-e Islami, the Sunni party most weakened by the Taliban advance has been the Harakat from which many commanders have defected. The rise of the Taliban has sparked intensive attempts to forge new political alignments among the participants in the Afghan power struggle. Defeated mujaheddin commanders from different parties have held meetings in Quetta to establish an anti-Taliban coalition, and negotiations have taken place between virtually all the parties to the conflict. Forced by declining support, Nabi Mohammadi has disassociated himself from the Rabbani government and sided with the Taliban.\(^6^7\) Both Masoud himself and emissaries from Hekmatyar have held meetings with the Taliban, as have Sayyaf, Khales and representatives of Dostam.\(^6^8\) In April envoys from the Rabbani government meet with Dostam in Tashkent to reestablish the al-

\(^{65}\) The News, 14 April 1995.

\(^{66}\) A large number of commanders are reported to have fled to Pakistan. They include a substantial number of Hizb-e Islami commanders, who are now residing in the Shamshatoo refugee camp outside Peshawar.

\(^{67}\) The three Harakat ministers and the chief justice in the Rabbani administration have resigned (Frontier Post, 11 March 1995).

\(^{68}\) These meetings are reported in The News, 20 March 1995; Herald, March 1995; and Asiaweek, 28 April 1995.
liance which dissolved in January 1994. Apart from Mohammadi’s defection, these meetings have so far not resulted in any major realignments, and the Taliban still maintain their opposition to all the former resistance leaders.

Essentially Afghanistan has for some time now been a stateless society fragmented into rival political entities of different sizes and levels of administrative incorporation. Even before the collapse of the Kabul regime in April 1992, the authority of the central government only extended to roughly 20 per cent of the country while the rest was under mujaheddin control. The mujaheddin takeover meant a further drastic reduction both in the extent of state control, which until recently only comprised parts of Kabul, and with regard to the administrative capacity and resources of the state apparatus. With the siege of Kabul by the Hizb-e Islami and now by the Taliban the government lost most of the income it might have had from taxation, and its economic foundation seems primarily to be the printing of new money. Government employees have fled the capital to escape the fighting, and many government buildings have been destroyed along with their records while others have been looted.

The situation of Afghanistan today resembles that described earlier for the more turbulent parts of the period preceding the consolidation of state power by Amir Abdur Rahman in the late nineteenth century. The country is split into different political entities ranging from the large domains of Ismail Khan, Rashid Dostam, Ahmad Shah Masoud and the Taliban, which extend over several provinces, down to the territories controlled by individual villages, kinship groups, factions and local leaders. The political map of Afghanistan features four to five states in the making, each controlling more territory than the central government in Kabul. Some of these are located on important trade routes and are therefore, unlike the Kabul authorities, able to generate considerable revenues from the taxation of commerce. Some command armed forces composed of mujaheddin and former army personnel which are as large and well equipped as those of the central government. These emergent states fall into two broad categories: one consists of those which are dominated by a single strong individual who, like former Afghan rulers, is referred to as the amir (ruler or chief) by his followers and subjects; the other of those where authority is held by shura representing coalitions of resistance parties, tribal leaders and other men of influence.

The first category comprises the political domains of Ismail Khan, Rashid Dostam and Ahmad Shah Masoud, and are located in predomi-

---

nantly non-Pashtun areas along the Northern and Western borders of Afghani-
stan. In addition to the city and province of Herat, the Jamiat commander Ismail Khan also controls parts of Badghis, Ghor, Farah and until recently also Nimruz. The former administrative setup of Herat has been preserved and, although parts of the city have been completely dev-
astated, it is recovering fast and emerging once again as the primary com-
mercial centre of Western Afghanistan. At least in the province of Herat itself, which forms the core area of Ismail Khan’s domain, a degree of sta-
bility and security has existed since 1992 that can be found in few other areas of the country. To the North-East the domain of Rashid Dostam ex-
tends from a core area comprising Mazar-i Sharif and the Balkh province to parts of the neighbouring provinces of Samangan, Jowzjan, Faryab and Baghl.
lan. In Mazar too, the administrative setup of the former regime has been preserved and the city, which has survived undamaged from the war, is likewise a flourishing commercial centre for Northern Afghanistan. Both the domains of Ismail Khan and Dostam comprise some of the Af-
ghanistan’s key agricultural areas and in addition Dostam controls the gasfields, which formerly yielded a large share of the country’s foreign exchange earnings. Both these leaders maintain independent relations with foreign powers, which have established consulates in Herat and Ma-
zar-i Sharif.

Further to the East, with its centre in Taloqan in the Takhar province, is the area controlled by Ahmad Shah Masoud, which also extends into the provinces of Badakshan, Kunduz, Baghl.
lan, Parwan and Kabul itself. Unlike the two other rulers, the administration of Masoud is derived from the setup he created during the resistance struggle in the form of the Shu-
ra-e Nizar. For all practical purposes, it is Masoud rather than Rabbani, the designated president and the formal leader of the Jamiat-e Islami party to which Masoud belongs, who represents the real power of the govern-
ment in Kabul. Rather than a state in the making, the domain which Hek-
matyar controlled around Charasyab south of Kabul appeared basically to be a bridgehead or military base for the conquest of the capital, the ulti-
mate political price in Afghanistan.

In the Pashtun belt along the Eastern and Southern borders of Af-
ghanistan, a different type of more extensive polities had been established in some areas after the mujaheddin takeover. In Ghazni, Nangarhar and

71) Both Iran and Pakistan have consulates in Herat, and besides these Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Russia also maintain consulates in Mazar-i Sharif.
on a smaller scale in Khost, coalitions of local leaders representing different resistance parties or tribal groups had formed joint councils (shura) which exercised varying degrees of authority over the territories they claimed to represent. Among these polities, those in Ghazni and Nangarhar resembled the emergent states in the non-Pashtun areas in the sense that they had taken over part of the former administrative setup and armed forces, had established a revenue base through taxation of commerce, and attempted to extend administrative control from the towns where they were based into the surrounding countryside. With the exception of the Nangarhar shura, all of these coalitions have been swept away by the Taliban advance. Thus, the multi-party shura of Nangarhar, headed by the Hizb-e Islami (Khales) commander, Abdul Qadir, which is loosely affiliated with shura representing the provinces of Kunar and Laghman, constitutes the only part of the Pashtun heartland still outside Taliban control.

The polity established by the Taliban incorporate elements of both the forms described above. The founder of the Taliban movement, Mohammad Omar, is referred to as amir. He heads a central or inner shura composed of the Kandahari clergy, who initially supported the movement and now head the most important branches of the administration. In addition, a broader shura comprises representatives of the areas that have come under Taliban rule. Like Ismail Khan and Dostam, the Taliban utilise civil servants and apparently also military personnel from the former regime and, like previous Afghan governments, they have appointed provincial governors who are not locals from the provinces they now rule. As in Herat, Mazar and Jalalabad, the main source of income for the Taliban administration is the taxation of transit trade - here through Kandahar - supplemented by voluntary donations from local merchants. In addition, funds have been taken from defeated mujaheddin commanders or ‘donated’ by those who sided with the Taliban. During their brief rule the Taliban have succeeded in restoring security by disarming people in most of the areas under their control and by removing the checkpoints established by different mujaheddin groups along the highways. This has facilitated the economic recovery of Kandahar and has ensured the widespread popular backing, not the least from traders and merchants. Their dependence on popular support has also made them receptive to popular attitudes, which seem more liberal than the strict vil-

72) The title amir ul-muminin (commander of the faithful) which is used by the Taliban for Mohammad Omar, underscores their self-perception as a primarily religious and moral force.
lage values advocated by the Taliban. Thus, their prohibition against women shopping unaccompanied by male relatives in the Kandahar bazaar was lifted when the population in Kandahar and in particular the traders opposed it.

All of these polities that have been established on the ruins of the former Afghan state are inherently fragile. In those dominated by one strong person, the entire political order is dependent on and associated with this individual. Should he disappear, the most likely consequence is that his domain will be plunged into the same kind of violent and chaotic succession struggle that Afghanistan has so often witnessed in the past. Where *shura* constitute the authority, potential rivalry for position and influence always threatens to dissolve their unity. Thus, in the Nangarhar *shura*, the rivalry between Abdul Qadir, the head of the *shura*, and the strong leader of the Ahmadzai nomads in the province, Haji Shamali, culminated in the summer of 1993, when Shamali together with some of his followers were ambushed and killed in Jalalabad city. Yet, although the murder of Haji Shamali was followed by clashes, the *shura* managed to curtail the unrest and the province of Nangarhar has remained largely peaceful.

Other factors also contribute to the fragility of these political entities and the stability they embody. Although they have all managed to establish some kind of revenue base through taxation of commerce, the resources they control are limited and are mainly used to maintain the political order that has been established. As is the case with the Kabul government itself, even the largest of these emergent states like those of Ismail Khan, Dostam or the *Taliban* use most of their available resources for the upkeep of their military forces, for allowances and subsidies for political allies, and for salaries to those employed in the administration. Apart from these salaries, which everywhere seem to be paid very erratically, very few resources are left to operate social services like education or health or to undertake reconstruction programmes of any kind.\(^{74}\)

Yet, despite their fragility, all of these political entities have managed to curtail internal conflicts within their domains and have strengthened their authority over the past couple of years. While they are independent of those who claim authority in Kabul, no steps have so far been taken to formally institutionalise this independence, although Dos-

---

\(^{74}\) In addition to rudimentary health services, schools for both boys and girls function in Herat, Mazar, Jalalabad and recently again in Kabul. However, despite the stability in Kandahar, schools remain closed and this has raised questions regarding the *Taliban* attitude concerning secular education (*Asiaweek*, 28 April 1995, p.41).
tam and his newly established party, the Jumbish-e Milli-e Islami (National Islamic Movement), have threatened to secede if Uzbek interests are not accommodated in the future setup of the country. So far, all the leaders of these polities still consider themselves part of Afghanistan. Moreover, with the exception of Masoud and Dostam, all these political entities including the smaller regional and local shura had successfully avoided becoming involved in the struggle in Kabul until the emergence of the Taliban. Although Ismail Khan had been fighting Hizb commanders within the area he strives to control, he had stayed out of the struggle for Kabul until the Taliban assault forced him to close ranks with Rabbani and Masoud.

With the rapid advance of the Taliban, for the first time since the conflict began in 1978 most of the Pashtuns have come under a unified leadership. However, that this has come about is not so much an expression of Taliban political aims, which seem to be national rather than ethnic, nor is it something the different Pashtun tribal groups, factions and communities has consciously aspired to bring about. It is rather an expression of the political fragmentation and military weakness that existed in most of eastern and Southern Afghanistan when the Taliban entered the scene. At the same time it indicates the extent of the disillusion and resentment with which most people have come to regard the former mujaheddin and their leaders. This is not something new. Even in the early eighties there was widespread scepticism regarding the resistance leaders, who were seen as self-seeking and corrupt, and their parties were often referred to as spag dukanan - the six shops (Christensen 1988:15). Since the fall of the communist regime, the rivalry for political power among the mujaheddin leaders, the destruction of Kabul, and the lawlessness and oppression by many local commanders seem to have deprived the mujaheddin of the legitimacy they had acquired during the jihad. Instead of the respectful term mujaheddin, they were increasingly referred to with the derisive topakyan (gunmen). It remains to be seen whether the Taliban will be able to maintain the widespread popular support with which they have been received in most of southern and eastern Afghanistan. This will depend on whether they can contain the divisive influences that may arise due to the diverse ideological background of their followers, and provide a durable unified administration that can ensure stable and peaceful conditions in the large areas they now rule.

Yet, the emergence of the Pashtuns as a largely unified political entity together with the national political agenda of the Taliban, in which they see themselves as those who should bring peace and proper Islamic
rule to all of Afghanistan, has set the scene for a continuation of the conflict. To the Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara and other ethnic groups, the uncompromising stance of the Taliban will be difficult to distinguish from an attempt to reestablish Pashtun dominance throughout Afghanistan. There can be little doubt that the longer the fighting continues and a political compromise leading to some form of representative government is not reached, the more the different regional political entities will emerge as states in their own right. This development would not be substantially altered in the event that the Taliban manages to oust Rabbani and Masoud from Kabul. Instead the besiegers would become the besieged, or Masoud might withdraw to consolidate his hold over his domain in the North-East and the fragmentation of Afghanistan would prevail.

Looting and Smuggling

Together, the fragmentation of political authority and the economic disruption and widespread poverty have created an environment in which lawlessness has increased to an unprecedented level. Throughout the war, the prospect of booty has been one of the factors which has motivated people on both sides, whether mujaheddin or militia, to participate in the struggle. Individual mujahed would sell arms captured during battle, and militias would loot the property of people considered opponents of the Kabul regime. When the Kabul regime abandoned some areas to the mujaheddin in order to consolidate its forces after the Soviet withdrawal, these areas were subjected to looting as happened in Asadabad in Kunar in October 1988. The same was the case with the few towns that fell to the mujaheddin before the final collapse of the Kabul regime. Thus, the town of Khost in Paktia, which was conquered in April 1991, was thoroughly looted both by mujaheddin and others including tribesmen from the Pakistani side of the border. This process was repeated on a larger scale when the Kabul regime fell in 1992, though not everywhere. In Jalalabad the local mujaheddin prevented other groups of mujaheddin, who had come down from Kunar and Laghman to the north, from entering the city and looting it. However, this did not prevent these local

75) The News: ‘Afghan Mujahideen split booty as soldiers’ bodies lie unburied’, 14 April 1991. When the author of this report visited Khost in May that year, it was evident that not a single shop in the large bazaar had escaped looting. In the years since then the town has recovered and the local shura has allowed the many Sikh traders, who had fled, to return and reclaim their shops.
mujaheddin groups from plundering the banks and dividing government property and buildings between them. While other towns including Kabul have shared a similar or worse fate, some large towns like Herat and Mazar seem to have escaped looting altogether.

Figure 4: Khost bazaar after the looting, May 1991

The Afghans refer to such loot as ghanima. According to Islamic jurisprudence this means the lawful booty taken from unbelievers in battle of which a part should be used for charitable purposes (Brill 1987:140). Since what passes for ghanima today qualifies on neither of these accounts, the term has acquired a derogatory meaning as an expression of the increasing disillusion that people feel regarding the mujaheddin.

Much of what is looted is exported to Pakistan for sale. At least since the Soviet withdrawal a whole ‘industry’ of exporting scrap metal has developed. Initially, destroyed tanks and other war material were taken to Pakistan for re-melting. With the mujaheddin takeover, the towns also became an object of this activity. Apart from the collection of regular scrap metal, this ‘industry’ has involved the looting of whatever installations and machinery that were found. Tens of thousands of tons of metal and equipment have crossed the border into Pakistan since 1992, and the result has literally been the dismantling of much of the physical achievements of the country’s pre-war development. The looting also includes objects from Afghanistan’s distant past. The National Museum in Kabul has been
pillaged and illegal digging for archaeological artifacts is common (Dupree 1995:36).76

Not only Afghanistan’s past but also its future is being robbed. The country’s few remaining forest areas in Paktia and Kunar are being cut down at an alarming rate and exported to Pakistan. Although there is a high demand for timber for reconstruction in Afghanistan, the purchasing power in Pakistan is higher and the timber goes there. Such timber smuggling did also take place before the war but on a much smaller scale. What is happening now is a totally uncontrolled exploitation, where large forest areas are being completely clearcut with grave long term ecological consequences. The often desperately poor communities, who hold traditional rights to the forests, sell these to Afghan timber merchants, some of whom are mujahedden commanders who act in collusion with Pakistani traders. Pakistan maintains a ban on the import of timber but occasionally this ban is lifted for a certain period. What then could be observed during 1993 was the build-up of huge stocks of timber on the Afghan side of the border, the lifting of the Pakistani import ban for a few weeks, and the rapid transport by hundreds of trucks of these stocks to Pakistan.

![Figure 5: Timber smuggling, Shigal in Kunar, August 1993](image)

Other forms of smuggling takes place from Afghanistan to Pakistan as well. Throughout the war arms have been flowing across the border into

---

76) In 1992 the author saw several cases, where local people were digging for artifacts at the famous Buddhist site at Hadda in Nangarhar.
Pakistan, where they have contributed to the development of the so-called ‘kalashnikov’ culture of violence and lawlessness.\(^{77}\) This export continues and probably reaches beyond the borders of Pakistan.\(^{78}\)

A considerable part of the flourishing trade that has developed in parts of Afghanistan, such as that through Herat, involves goods destined to be smuggled into Pakistan.\(^{79}\) This also applies to a very large part, if not most, of the huge volume of goods imported through Pakistan for Afghanistan under the ‘Transit Trade Agreement’ between the two countries from 1965.\(^{80}\) These goods comprise everything from consumer electronics to dyes, ball bearings, vehicle parts and tires. The result has not just been that the Pakistani exchequer is deprived of huge customs earnings, but also that the Pakistani industries manufacturing these products find it increasingly difficult to compete with the cheaper imports. This prompted Pakistan to initially restrict and then ban imports to Afghanistan under the 1965 transit agreement, a move which has caused considerable resentment in Afghanistan.\(^{81}\) However, this has not stopped the smuggling. Instead, Afghan traders have increased their imports via Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Iran, and in addition daily flights from the United Arab Emirates bring goods destined for Pakistan to Jalalabad’s airport.\(^{82}\)

**Drug Production**

Afghanistan is today the largest producer of opium in the world. With an estimated production of around 3,200 tons in 1992, it exceeds that of the entire Golden Triangle in South-East Asia.\(^{83}\) The main areas of production are the provinces of Helmand and Nangarhar, followed by Uruzgan and Badakshan.

---


\(^{78}\) *The News*: ‘Weapons being smuggled through Pakistan?’, 4 January 1992. This trade may even include the advanced portable Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, which the USA unsuccessfully has tried to buy back from the *mujaheddin* after the fall of the Kabul regime (*The News*, 14 August 1993).


\(^{82}\) *The News*: ‘Smugglers find new route to Pakistan’, 4 April 1995.
The poppy was also cultivated in Afghanistan before the war, though on a much smaller scale. Apart from local medical use, Iran constituted the main market from the fifties to the seventies (MacDonald 1992:62). In the mid-seventies political changes resulting in decreasing supplies from some of the countries in the Golden Triangle led to an increasing demand for opium from Afghanistan and Pakistan. At the same time heroin laboratories were established in the Tribal Agencies on the Pakistani side of the border and the opium produced in eastern Afghanistan was refined here.

During the war poppy cultivation increased in some of the areas under mujaheddin control. It has often been claimed that income from opium production was an important source of income to purchase weapons during the resistance against Soviet occupation (e.g. MacDonald 1992:64). While this has undoubtedly been the case, not all mujaheddin groups were involved in this, nor was poppy cultivated in all areas suited for this crop.84

The return of the refugees from 1992 onwards has meant a drastic increase in poppy cultivation. In certain districts of Nangarhar that had been largely depopulated during the war, more than half of the cultivated areas were sown with poppy in 1993.85 At least in eastern Afghanistan the background is the same as it was before the war: land fragmentation and poverty. Now as then poppy cultivation is considered haram (‘forbidden’) and against the teachings of Islam, but those who cultivate it argue that they have little choice if they are to feed their families and reestablish their existence.

The disappearance of central authority provides the context in which this increase in poppy cultivation is taking place. Yet, the stance regarding poppy cultivation by local authorities and shura is not uniform. Thus in Kunar, which was a poppy cultivating area before the war, the radical Islamist shura has successfully managed to eradicate nearly all poppy cultivation since 1991. In contrast, such cultivation has been reported to take

83) The figure of 3,200 tons is from The Geopolitical Drug Dispatch (No. 24, Paris, August 1994, p.5). The estimated 1994 production from the Golden Triangle is 2,500 tons (Lintner 1995). Figures from the US Drug Enforcement Agency have consistently been lower than those of the UN, and their estimate for 1994 is 950 tons (Rashid 1994:23).
84) In March 1981, the time when the poppy is in flower, the author visited mujaheddin controlled areas of Kunar, where poppy had been cultivated before the war, but where there were now no signs of poppy fields.
85) This was the case in the districts of Mohmandda, Rodat, and Chaprahar which the author visited in the spring of 1993.
place at the Ghazi Abad state farm, which is under the control of Nangarhar’s provincial shura. In addition, local commanders in some of the poppy cultivating districts of the province are said to have imposed a tax on opium sales.86

The emergence of the Taliban as the dominant political force in most of eastern and southern Afghanistan may contribute significantly towards reducing the extent of drug production. When the Taliban took control over the provinces of Kandahar and Helmand in November 1994, they took steps to curtail drug production. While the drug merchants and heroin laboratories have disappeared, the Taliban have not yet banned opium cultivation, which still continues in Helmand but is reported to have ceased in Kandahar. The reason stated by the Taliban is that, with the present level of destruction and economic disruption, such a ban would threaten the livelihood of many farmers.87

The anti-drug policies of the Taliban have had implications for the other main area of cultivation, Nangarhar. Some of the ulama have been opposed to the cultivation of poppy, but unlike Kunar, they have until recently not wielded sufficient influence to impose any restrictions. In the wake of the success of the Taliban, these ulama have been putting increasing pressure on the governor of Nangarhar, Haji Qadir, who is reported to have taken some steps to if not eradicate, then at least limit, the extent of cultivation.88 In a situation where the measures undertaken so far by the UN Drug Control Programme have had very little effect on the extent of cultivation, these religiously based restrictions provides the best hope for a reduction of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. However, Haji Qadir has taken the argument of the Taliban a step further and warned, that if farmers are not supported with assistance to develop ordinary farming, the cultivation of poppy will be allowed again for the next season.89

While this may be an attempt to secure external aid for Nangarhar, it does at the same time reflect the basic fact that, without assistance, many farmers will be forced by economic realities to continue poppy cultivation. Only if restrictions by the authorities are accompanied by economic de-

86) The estimated production figures for 1994 clearly show the implications of such differences in policy by local authorities. Unreleased figures from the United Nations Drug Control Programme assess the production in Kunar at 16 tons, whereas that in Nangarhar is nearly 1,400 tons.
87) The News, ibid.
88) The News, 4 December 1994 and the Nation 17 December 1994. The Financial Times (16 February 1995) reports that as much as 60 per cent of the poppy crop in the 1994/95 season has been destroyed in Nangarhar. However, other sources of information estimate a far more modest reduction.
development, which provides a market for alternative crops as well as em-
ployment opportunities outside agriculture, is the current situation likely
to change. In the meantime, addiction may increase among the Afghan
population. While it was very limited before the war, there seems to have
been an increase in drug abuse among the refugees in Pakistan. Afghani-
stan may be destined to undergo the same development as Pakistan, where
heroin abuse was insignificant in 1980, but where there is now between
1.5 and 1.9 million heroin addicts (Rashid 1994:26).

**International Linkages**

During the entire conflict in Afghanistan, both sides have been tied to
external allies who have used these relations to further their own
interests. With the end of the Cold War, Afghanistan is no longer an arena
for super-power rivalry, but its immediate neighbours Pakistan and Iran
as well as the new independent Central Asian republics of Tajikistan,
Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan all continue to have a direct stake in its
future. So has countries further away like Saudi Arabia and India.

The legacy of Pakistan’s central role in aiding the Afghan resistance
struggle remains. Throughout the war, the military assistance provided by
the USA, and that by the Saudis and Chinese as well, was channelled
through the Pakistani military with the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) in
the key role (Yousaf & Adkin 1992:97). It was the ISI which decided how
the assistance was to be allocated among the different Afghan resistance
groups recognised by the Pakistani authorities. The result was that the Is-
lamist parties, and in particular the *Hizb-e Islami* of Hekmatyar, received
the largest share (Weinbaum 1991:78). Despite growing reservations the
US administration accepted this, although Hekmatyar made no secret of
his anti-Western attitude. The Pakistani governments that have succeeded
each other since the end of Zia-ul Haq’s military dictatorship in August
1988 have apparently not managed to curtail the independent role of the
ISI, and it seems to have been able to pursue its own Afghan policy at least
until quite recently.90

Whether this situation has changed significantly since Pakistan’s present minister of
interior made this statement nearly four years ago is unclear, but observers maintain
that “...the fuel and ammunition needed for tank and artillery units for all the rival forc-
es, including that of Hekmatyar and Masoud, are coming into Afghanistan from one
neighbouring country or the other” (*The Herald*, February 1994, p.44).
One reason behind this apparent support for Hekmatyar could be Pakistan’s interest in the formation of a government in Afghanistan with an Islamic internationalist orientation, which would finally recognise the border between the two countries and abandon the irredentist policies of previous Afghan regimes. However, to the extent that this policy negates the attempts by Pakistan and others to promote a negotiated settlement, it has also postponed the attainment of two other objectives. The first is the return of the refugees, who are becoming an increasing political and economic burden. The second is the establishment of links with the Central Asian republics, which has been a central issue in the political debate in Pakistan ever since the break-up of the Soviet Union.91

Parallel to the involvement of the Pakistani administration, a web of relations have developed which link groups in Afghanistan with groups of a similar ideological background in Pakistan and elsewhere in the Islamic world. These relations have provided the channels for external funding, ideological influences, and the participation of volunteers from other Muslim countries in the Afghan struggle. Many, though not all, of these foreign volunteers have since then returned to their home countries to participate in Islamic revolutionary movements there.92 At the same time training camps have been established in Afghanistan to support radical movements in other countries. This web of relations also include the refugees in Pakistan, where numerous madrasa have been established both with the support of the Islamist parties in Pakistan and with funds from the Gulf countries.

The Iranian involvement in Afghanistan springs to a certain extent from an attempt to counter such influences, especially from Saudi Arabia, in order to protect the interests of the Imami Shia minority there. Iran has played a central role in the formation of some of the Shia resistance groups, and in March 1990 it was instrumental in getting eight of the nine Shia parties to form the coalition known as Hizb-e Wahdat.93 Together with Pakistan, Iran has participated in the effort to reach a political settlement, but its support for greater Shia representation in a future Afghan

92) According to the former ISI chief, Hameed Gul, perhaps as many as 25,000 foreign volunteers participated in the Afghan jihad, most fighting with either Sayyaf or Hekmatyar (Herald: ‘The green revolutionary’ May 1993, p. 53).
93) The only Imami Shia party outside this coalition is the Harakat-e Enqelab-i Islami (Islamic Revolutionary Movement), headed by Ayatollah Mohseni, who is opposed to the growing influence of Teheran.
government has been meet with opposition from Sunni leaders like Sayyaf and Khales, who are strongly biased against the Shia.

Afghanistan’s dispute with Pakistan over the Pashtunistan question, and that between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, formed the basis for close relations between the two countries before the war. These friendly relations were maintained with the Kabul regime throughout the war, and India also accepted the Soviet justification for its intervention. As a result, India has completely lost its former influence in Afghanistan, and in a radical departure from the policies of former Afghan governments the mujaheddin have endorsed Pakistan’s support for the right to self-determination for the people in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

With the emergence of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as independent countries, a new factor has been added to the political equation that influences developments in Afghanistan. The political elites in these new states, are all products of the former Soviet system. They fear the destabilising influences from the Islamists in Afghanistan; a fear that has been confirmed by the support by various Afghan groups for the Islamic opposition in Tajikistan. To counter this threat and create a buffer against Islamist influences, support has been extended for Dostam and his Uzbek nationalist movement.94 At the same time, these countries share Pakistan’s interest in closer economic links and the establishment of a regional infrastructure to promote trade. So far the realisation of these interests have been frustrated by the ongoing struggle in Kabul, through which runs the principal road linking Central Asia with Pakistan.

This recently prompted an entirely new initiative from Pakistan, which can have a significant impact on the future of Afghanistan. To explore an alternative connection to Central Asia in September 1994, the Pakistani interior minister, Naseerullah Babar, led a convoy via Kandahar to Herat and on to Ashkhabad in Turkmenistan. During the trip a Pakistani consulate was inaugurated in Herat and discussions were held with Ismail Khan regarding repair of the road.95 In October this was followed up by a meeting between Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and the president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyasov in Ashkhabad, where they agreed “..

94) Whether this support is aided by Russia is a matter of conjecture. In any case Russia supports the attempts by the new Central Asian states to curtail Islamist influences and has stationed troops along the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. In mid-April 1995, Russian planes carried out several bombing raids on alleged Tajik opposition bases in Afghanistan, killing more than 100 Afghans in Taloqan, the capital of Masoud’s political domain (Frontier Post, 14 April 1995).
to cooperate for initiating trade between Pakistan and Central Asia by using transit facilities through Afghanistan”.96 At the same occasion Bhutto also held meetings with Ismail Khan and Dostam. An accord was signed with Afghanistan in early December committing the Pakistanis to finance repair of the road connection via Kandahar and Herat to Turkmenistan. Apart from being a reflection of Pakistan’s low expectations regarding a political settlement in Kabul, these developments are also likely to strengthen the ability of Herat to function as an independent polity.

The sudden appearance of the Taliban coincided with these developments and appears to be closely related to them. Most observers presume that the Taliban at least initially were backed by the Pakistani administration.97 When Afghan madrasa students and teachers emerged as a new political force in southern Afghanistan, one of their first acts was to open the road from the Pakistani border to Kandahar and free a Pakistani trade convoy, hijacked by mujaheddin, which was on its way to Herat and Turkmenistan.

Provided these assumptions regarding Pakistani backing for the Taliban are correct, it may mean a significant shift in Pakistani policy in several respects. It signifies an end to the former support for Hekmatyar, who has proved unable both to conquer Kabul and rally the Pashtuns behind him. It may also indicate a shift away from the former reliance on the ISI as the main Pakistani instrument for implementing its Afghan policy, and in favour of the Ministry of Interior. Moreover, instead of the Jamaat-e Islami, with its history of close relations to Zia ul-Haq’s dictatorship and its opposition to Benazir Bhutto, the Jamiat-e Ulama-e Islam now occupies the position as the central link to the Afghan Islamists. Together with the decreasing importance of the ISI regarding Pakistan’s Afghan policy, this could mean that the Bhutto administration has now attempted to create its own basis for relations with the different political groups in Afghanistan, be they the Taliban or others.

Yet, the support by Benazir Bhutto and her interior minister for the Taliban may turn out to be as uncontrollable as the first time the Pakistanis opened the Pandora’s box of Afghan politics, when Zia ul-Haq and the ISI promoted the radical Islamist mujaheddin during the resistance strug-

gle. The recent events in Afghanistan have demonstrated that, despite Pakistani support for the *Taliban*, they do not control them. The attempts by the *Taliban* to advance into the areas controlled by Ismail Khan have blocked the newly opened road to Central Asia. Their attacks on Kabul has further reduced the prospects of a peaceful settlement, which would enable both Pakistani access to the north across the Hindu Kush and promote the return of the refugees.98 In addition the *Taliban*, motivated either by Afghan nationalism or by the need to support the traders who provide them with most of their funds, halted a Pakistani truck convoy bringing cotton from Turkmenistan in response to the Pakistani ban on transit trade through Karachi.99 These events may have prompted the Central Asian republics to look for alternative transit options which bypasses both Afghanistan and Pakistan. In April, Turkmenistan signed a treaty with India and Iran regarding the import of Indian goods via the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas.100 Thus, it appears increasingly uncertain whether the *Taliban* will be instrumental in the achievement of Pakistan’s political objectives in Afghanistan. At the same time there exists the possibility of a future political spill-over to Pakistan, where many if not most of the *Taliban* have been trained. Here the network of *madrasa* from which they originate have a student body estimated to be around 2.5 million. These could prove to be as strong a political force in Pakistani politics as they are in Afghanistan.101

98) According to *Herald* (February 1995, p.57), the Pakistani administration did not expect the *Taliban* to advance beyond the Pashtun areas.
Legal Conditions and Human Rights

The Afghan Legal System

During this century three different conceptual systems have been simultaneously used in Afghanistan to settle conflicts and impose sanctions. These are the ‘traditional’ local norms and practices of which pashtunwali is the most well known example, the Sharia (Islamic law), and ‘modern’ state law, which to some extent derives from the West or from other modernising Muslim countries. Since these systems contain features which are conceptually incompatible, the extent to which they have been applied has varied over time. Such variations have been closely related to political conditions, since the systems are tied to and articulate the interests and aspirations of different social groupings.

From the end of the nineteenth century, Afghan rulers have consistently attempted, though with varying success, to gain control over the interpretation of religious law in order to present their rule and the laws supporting it as legitimated by Islam. To reconcile secular and religious law has required the consent of the religious elite, the ulama. This has been attempted by various measures to control and accommodate the ulama, who have opposed any changes which would undermine its position and authority.

Parallel to this, the rulers of Afghanistan have attempted to replace local mechanisms of conflict resolution with either state law or Sharia. Although Muslim, the population in the rural areas of Afghanistan and in particular the Pashtun tribes, do not employ Sharia as their principal mechanism for resolution and settlement of conflicts. Instead they rely on norms and precepts which, like pashtunwali, the Pashtun code of honour, emphasize the autonomy and equality of the individual (and his family) vis-a-vis others. The role of pashtunwali is to maintain or, when required restore, the balance between the involved parties. To achieve this, councils (jirga) are appointed with the consent of the involved parties to serve as arbitration committees. These reach a consensus on how the case can
be solved and also apply sanctions to enforce the decision if necessary. Although Islamic principles may also be applied, the focus of conflict resolution is on mediation and adjustment of claims rather than of adjudication and meeting out of punishments as is the case in a government controlled judicial system (Ghani 1978:269).

Although persons of religious repute are often involved in conflict settlement through *jirga*, the non-Islamic features of tribal customs and norms are at the same time opposed by some religious leaders. The state have often been able to draw on *ulama* when trying to replace local mechanisms of conflict settlement with its own court system. This attitude is shared by the radical Islamic resistance parties, who view the tribal system as un-Islamic since it contains elements which deviate from *Sharia* law. They also see it as dividing the *umma* (the Islamic community) and thus constituting a potential threat to their vision of a unified Islamic state. Like Afghan rulers before them, the radical Islamic parties including the *Taliban* are therefore likely to continue the effort to replace local mechanisms of conflict resolution where they attempt to introduce a rule of law.

Until the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman (1880-1901), the role of the state in judicial affairs was relatively limited. The judicial power of the central government varied profoundly from region to region (Ghani 1978:270). Outside the towns and the rural areas under the direct control of the political centre, the settlement of conflicts was mostly undertaken according to customary rules. The expansion of state power under Amir Abdur Rahman was accompanied by attempts both to do away with local autonomy in legal matters, and to bring the *ulama* under the control of the state. A system of courts was set up throughout the country. The rules of procedure were laid down by the Amir himself, and he also personally appointed the judges. The result was a certain administrative unity but, despite the reforms, Afghanistan did not possess a uniform code of laws (Gregorian 1969:137). Although the court system reached far into the countryside, it did not manage to suppress local mechanisms of conflict settlement, which continue to be in use to this day.

The consolidation of state authority by Amir Abdur Rahman was carried out with absolute ruthlessness. Thousands of political opponents were executed, imprisoned, or exiled to other parts of the country. The punishments defined by the judicial system were no less harsh. Theft could be punished by amputations, and highway robbers were sometimes placed alive in iron cages suspended over the road and left to die of starvation (ibid:138).
When Abdur Rahman was succeeded by his son Habibullah (1901-19), some of these harsh punishments were abolished. Torture of prisoners and mutilation were banned as punishments, and the anti-slavery laws already introduced by Abdur Rahman were strengthened. The extent to which these reforms were actually applied is unclear, but it seems that conditions did improve and at least state executions declined in number (ibid:199).

The modernisation attempted by Amir Amanullah (1919-29) also included the legal system. During his rule the Nizamnama (‘governing regulations’), often referred to as the first constitution of Afghanistan, was introduced from 1923 onwards. The code was drawn up with assistance from Turkish legal experts and was influenced by existing Turkish laws. For the first time in Afghanistan, guarantees were laid down in law for civil rights comprising freedom of the press, free speech and security of property, while the king was made subject to existing laws.

However, the Nizamnama did not replace sharia but was presented as compatible with Islam. The attempt to reconcile secular and religious law was made with the assistance of ulama who issued a fatwa (legal advice by a person of religious status) stating that the legislation was not contrary to Sharia (Poullada 1973:106). The penal code continued to include punishments defined in sharia such as amputations, flogging and stoning to death, and membership of certain outlawed Muslim sects was punishable by death (Gregorian 1969:250). At the same time the code also attempted to institutionalise many features of Pashtunwali as a means to strengthen government control over tribal justice (ibid:251). Thus, the legal reforms of Amanullah tried to achieve several things at the same time. To introduce the principle of individual rights, to preserve Sharia as a central element of the legal system and, like his predecessors to strengthen the royal control over the administration of justice.

When Nadir Shah (1930-33) assumed power after crushing the rebellion which had toppled Amanullah, there was a need to frame a new constitution that would accommodate the traditionalist power groups who had supported him. This constitution, which was introduced in 1931, “..formalised tribal, religious, and dynastic interests, fusing them into a clear conception of the Afghan monarch as the personification of the state and the government” (Gregorian 1969:307). As a departure from the tight control established by Amir Abdur Rahman, the Sharia courts were granted full autonomy, though the king reserved his right to give final approval to their actions. Although the new constitution provided for legal equality, personal liberties and property rights, many of Amanullah’s secularist
measures were abolished. Civil and criminal law again became entirely based on Islamic law (ibid: 299). Thus, the ulama regained some of its power, and Gregorian interprets this not just as a concession but also as an attempt to make use of the religious establishment to extend the influence of the monarchy over the tribal population (ibid: 305). This process of centralising the judiciary power in Kabul through legal and administrative measures continued under Zahir Shah (1933-73), but the state still had to leave certain areas of dispute settlement such as intra-tribal disputes to local arbitration through jirga (ibid: 372).

Nadir Shah’s constitution was replaced in 1964 by a new constitution, which for the first – and last – time in Afghanistan’s history granted the judiciary an independent position in relation to the executive branches of government. “This constitution attempted to preserve the basic tenets of Islam while also responding to the need for social change and democratic reform” (Kamali 1985:21). A supreme court was established, and an attempt was made to create a unified system of courts throughout the country based on uniformity in judicial practice, organisation and court procedures. However, the independence of the judiciary was never fully realised (Gossman 1991:7). Nor did the reorganisation and modernisation of the court system succeed fully (Ghani 1983/84:562). Nevertheless, between 1963 and 1973 the protection of human rights improved notably (Rubin 1987:336).

This process was halted when ex-prime minister, Daoud, took power in 1973 with the support of army officers linked to Parcham. The 1964 constitution was abolished by decree and the judiciary again came under executive rule. Repression of political opponents increased. A former prime minister, Mohammad Hashem Maiwandwal (1965-67), died in prison under mysterious circumstances (Dupree 1980:761). After the unsuccessful uprising by Islamic revolutionaries in 1975 several hundred were arrested, and some were executed.

A new republican constitution was introduced in 1977 to provide a legal foundation for the assumption of power by Daoud. Whereas the 1964 constitution had been formulated in a relatively democratic fashion where public debate played a role in determining its content, this was not the case with Daoud’s constitution. It substantially reduced civil liberties but, in line with Daoud’s modernist aspirations, the constitutional position of Islam remained basically the same as under the previous constitution (Karmali 1985:11). The constitution revived the supreme court but it now was subject to the authority of the executive, which in general acquired greater powers than those granted by the previous constitution (ibid:241-42).
Following the communist coup in 1978 executive control over the judiciary was strengthened. The provisional constitution of 1980 concentrated power in the hands of the Revolutionary Council of the PDPA but did not prescribe how the members of this body were to be elected (ibid:11). The constitution proclaimed that the Revolutionary Council constituted ‘the highest organ of the state’ with supreme authority regarding legislation, as well as concerning all matters pertaining to domestic and foreign policy (Vafai 1988:14). At the same time the constitution paid only lip service to Islam and was silent regarding any measures to protect citizens against abuse of power or the accountability of the Revolutionary Council (Karmali 1985:11).

**Human Rights Violations after the 1978 Coup**

After the communist coup d’etat in April 1978 repression and violations of human rights increased to a level unprecedented in Afghan history. During the ten year period from the coup to the signing of the Geneva Accords in April 1988, an estimated 1.24 million Afghans lost their lives.102 Most of the casualties were caused by indiscriminate aerial bombardments in the rural areas by the Afghan and Soviet airforces. In addition, tens of thousands of people disappeared either in prisons like Pul-e Charki i Kabul, or as victims of arrests, executions and massacres in the countryside.

This repression began immediately after the coup, when the PDPA initiated a brutal repression of both real and imagined opponents. Amnesty International described a government policy of imprisoning any individual or member of a political group which the government considered to be in actual or potential opposition to its policies. Most of the people detained were held without trial, torture was widely used, and prisoners were summarily executed without trial or simply disappeared.103 Those arrested or killed included political leaders from the constitutionalist period such as the former prime ministers Moussa Shafiq and Nur Ahmad

102) Obviously, figures on the casualties suffered by the Afghan population must be estimates. The most comprehensive investigation undertaken is that of Sliwinski (1989), who concludes that the number of Afghans killed during the first ten years of war are probably around 1.25 million, although it could be as high as 1.5 million or as low as 1 million.

Etemedi, members of Daoud’s family and others from the royal lineage, spiritual leaders such as members of the Mujaddedi family, university students and professors, government officials, military officers, and members of other political parties whether Islamist or left-wing organisations like the Pashtun nationalist *Afghan Mellat* and the Maoist groups. In rural areas local notables, whether secular or religious, were frequently imprisoned and many disappeared. When conflict broke out between the *Parcham* and *Khalq* factions of the PDPA, members of first *Parcham* and after the Soviet invasion of *Khalq* were also imprisoned and many were executed.

The number of victims during the period of Communist rule before the Soviet invasion will probably never be known but in September 1979, when Hafizullah Amin ousted Taraki, the Ministry of Interior announced that it would publish lists of 12,000 persons who had died in Kabul jails since April 1978 (Rubin 1987:339). These lists were apparently never released but it has been estimated that as many as fifty to one hundred thousand people had disappeared by December 1979 when the Soviet invasion took place (Roy 1986:95, 97).

**Human Rights Violations during the Soviet Occupation**

After the Soviet invasion the new government of Babrak Karmal tried to gain legitimacy by blaming the previous atrocities on the *Khalqis* and in particular on Hafizullah Amin. An amnesty for political prisoners was decreed just after the invasion and some were released before the Soviet-backed government started its own arrests of political opponents.

New arrests of political opponents began in late February 1980. Soviet advisers were now closely involved in the security set-up of the regime, and prisoners were subjected to systematic torture and exe-

104) Thus, in June 1978 the several hundred Islamist militants, who had been arrested by Daoud after the failed rising in 1975 were executed in a single night (Roy 1986:97).

105) The Parchamis conveniently forgot that, in the first months after the 1978 coup, the Ministry of Interior functioned as a detention centre for political prisoners; this was headed by Nur Ahmad Nur, a Parchami.

106) The number of political prisoners released is unclear. The Kabul Government gave the figure of 6,146 prisoners released in Kabul alone and 15,084 in the whole country (Rubin 1987:353), whereas Amnesty International reported that between 3,000 to 4,000 prisoners had been released from the Pul-e Charki prison in Kabul (*Amnesty International Report* 1980).
In February 1985, the UN Special Rapporteur reported that over 50,000 political prisoners were estimated to be held in prisons in Kabul and the provinces (Rubin 1987:350).

Both the Soviet occupation forces and their Afghan allies violated the 1949 Geneva Conventions on the ‘rules of war’. The counterinsurgency strategy pursued by the Soviet and Afghan armed forces entailed massive indiscriminate bombing of villages in areas under the control or influence of the resistance. Apart from bombardments, the strategy also involved the intentional destruction by the Soviet and Afghan armies of crops, domestic animals and food stores in the villages. Reprisals including several massacres of civilians were undertaken after military actions by the resistance (Rubin 1987:342).

**Human Rights Situation after the Soviet Withdrawal**

After the Soviet withdrawal in February 1989, the regime introduced various legal reforms in connection with its attempts to broaden its political base through the policy of ‘national reconciliation’. Yet systematic human rights violations continued such as torture and mistreatment of detainees during interrogation as well as execution of captured mujaheddin although not on the same level as before (Gossman 1991:4). In areas beyond government control, the indiscriminate bombing and rocketing of villages by Afghan government forces still took place.108

As before, the militias operating in alliance with the government also continued to commit abuses against civilians, loot their property, execute mujaheddin prisoners and undertake indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas (ibid: 40-41).

---


Human Rights Violations by the Resistance

Both during and after the Soviet occupation the resistance has also been responsible for human rights violations, although on a smaller scale compared with the regime. These violations have taken place both in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. The scale and gravity of such violations have varied among the different resistance groups.

Since the beginning of the war in both Afghanistan and Pakistan certain mujaheddin parties have kidnapped, imprisoned or murdered Afghans whom they considered political opponents. The victims comprise members of rival political organisations, as well as Afghan intellectuals and relief workers. It would appear that, with the increasing rivalry among the resistance parties following the Soviet withdrawal, the killings of political opponents inside Afghanistan increased.¹⁰⁹ Likewise in Pakistan, the radical Islamic resistance parties in particular have continued to kill or kidnap political opponents whether commanders, Afghan relief workers or intellectuals who were considered too critical or independent.¹¹⁰ It appears that in none of these cases have the Pakistani police or security forces conducted investigations which brought the perpetrators to court.

The resistance parties and groups have differed in their treatment of prisoners and political opponents. According to Rubin, Afghan conscripts taken as prisoners by the mujaheddin were usually released, but instances took place where Afghan army officers, Soviet prisoners, and suspected government spies were executed (1987:350). In other instances, mujaheddin groups are reported to have summarily executed government soldiers captured in combat (Gossman 1991:42).

All of the resistance parties and some individual commanders operate prisons either in Afghanistan or Pakistan or both. The way these prisons are run and prisoners are treated is entirely in the hands of those who operate the prisons, and there is consequently no safeguards against the mistreatment of prisoners. The number of prisoners held is unknown, but is estimated to be several hundred (ibid:101-102).

¹⁰⁹) The most glaring incident is probably the ambush and execution by a commander from Hizb-e Islami (Hekmatyar) of 31 members of Jamiat-e Islami in July 1989, when the latter were returning from a meeting with other members of their party in northern Afghanistan.

¹¹⁰) Asia Watch estimates that the number of Afghans who have been killed or abducted by political opponents runs into hundreds of persons. For examples see Gossman (1991:113-19). The most recent example of such abductions took place in February 1995, when three former professors from Kabul University disappeared in Peshawar (Nation, 14 March 1995).
Indiscriminate rocket attacks by certain mujaheddin commanders on Afghan cities including Kabul also took place during the struggle against the communist regime. The rockets used in these attacks were notoriously inaccurate. The casualties were mainly civilians and their number ran into hundreds of people. According to Gossman, rockets were purchased from the Egyptians by the U.S. Central Intelligence Service and given to the Pakistani intelligence service ISI, which encouraged the attacks, supplied the weapons and even paid money to commanders willing to use them (1991:44, 50).

The Situation after the Mujaheddin Takeover

Since the mujaheddin takeover in April 1992, the lack of centralised authority in large parts of the country and the widespread factional fighting has been accompanied by what Amnesty International describes as a situation where human rights abuses are committed with impunity and where the rule of law is virtually absent.111

When the mujaheddin took control of Kabul, it was intact after the fourteen years of war. The power struggle between rival mujaheddin groups has involved indiscriminate shelling and rocketing that has destroyed large parts of the city and caused the death of more than 16,000 persons.112 In addition, almost half of the population has left the city as refugees. All of the groups involved in the fighting in and around Kabul appear to have engaged in looting and, according to both Amnesty International and the UN, torture, execution of prisoners and rape are common. The victims have included members of rival political groupings and their families, as well as civilians not associated with any particular group.113 Educated Afghan women are particularly exposed to human rights violations since many mujaheddin groups see them as having violated Islamic norms.114 Although conditions outside Kabul have not deteriorated to the

112) According to Amnesty International some 12,000 people had been killed in Kabul between April 1992 and October 1994 (AI Index, 28 October 1994). By July 1995, ICRC reported that more than 4.000 persons had been killed since the beginning of the year (Situation of human rights in Afghanistan, UN General Assembly, November 1994, p.12).
114) Afghanistan: Political crisis and the refugees, Amnesty International, September 1993. Incidents were Afghan women are threatened, abused and even murdered by radical Islamists are also reported from Peshawar (Nation, 1 June 1994).
same level, incidents have taken place which involve human rights violations. Thus, when Haji Shamali, the deputy governor of Nangarhar, was assassinated by political opponents from the shura of Nangarhar in September 1993, his brother was taken prisoner and allegedly tortured to death.

After the mujaheddin takeover, thousands of political prisoners held by the communist regime were released. However, this amnesty did not apply to the hundreds of political prisoners held in the prisons controlled by some of the resistance parties, and their fate remains unknown. In connection with the ongoing power struggle the resistance parties have continued to imprison political opponents. They are often held for exchange with prisoners taken by rival factions or for ransom.115

In April 1993 a general amnesty was declared for former members of the ruling party and government. This amnesty has not prevented extrajudicial killings of persons associated with the former regime, which have taken place both in the capital and in some of the provinces. Nevertheless, the scale of such reprisal killings is much lower than might have been expected in view of the atrocities committed during communist rule. This may not be the effect of the amnesty as such, but is probably attributable partly to the alliances which have been formed between resistance parties and sections of the former regime, and partly by the protection provided by tribal and kinship relations.

**Judicial Fragmentation and Introduction of Sharia Law**

After the mujaheddin takeover in Kabul all laws not in conformity with Islamic precepts were declared void, and Sharia courts were set up. The new government curtailed several fundamental freedoms, such as the right to freedom of expression, religion and association, and political parties considered non-Islamic were banned. In September 1993 a draft constitution was presented to the cabinet. Its provision to introduce the Hanafi school of Sharia was opposed by the Shia who follow another legal interpretation.

While most groups in Afghanistan may be in agreement with the intention of the present government to introduce Sharia law throughout the country, they do not recognize its authority over judicial affairs. The disintegration of state power has been accompanied by the fragmentation of:

judicial authority. Even before the collapse of the communist government, courts were established to deal with criminal and political cases in some of the areas under mujaheddin control. Trial procedures vary greatly from one area to another, and in many cases, mujaheddin commanders seem to have as much say in the verdict as the Islamic judges appointed to hear the cases (Gossman 1991:100). Nevertheless, in some of the larger regional political entities that have emerged, attempts have been made to establish something resembling unified judicial systems. This would appear to be the case both in the regions controlled by such rulers as Ismail Khan, Dostam and Masoud, and in some of those controlled by shura like that in Jalalabad. Fairly well organised judicial systems are reported to exist in the areas controlled by both Ismail Khan and Dostam, and also in Nangarhar.116 While the judicial systems primarily use Sharia law, at least those in the domains of Ismail Khan and Dostam also draw on legislation and procedures from previous regimes to the extent that these are considered compatible with Islam. In the areas controlled by Masoud, an attempt to introduce a consistent legal code based on Sharia among the commanders affiliated with the Shura-e Nizar was made even before the collapse of the communist regime (Gossman 1991:104).117

At least until the emergence of the Taliban as the dominant force in eastern Afghanistan, conflict resolution in this part of the country was based as much on pashtunwali and the tribal jirga as on Sharia law implemented by Islamic judges. The introduction of Sharia is a central objective of the Taliban, but it is as yet unclear to what extent they have tried to impose Sharia at the expense of pashtunwali or what the local reactions to this might be.

What is clear, however, is that if at some point in time a government emerges out of the present power struggle and a rule of law is established, the basis of this will be Sharia. Islamic revivalism has replaced the pre-war attempts to reconcile basic Islamic doctrines with modernist ideals. This will have implications for the status of human rights. At the moment the interpretations of Sharia practised in Afghanistan, whether Sunni or Shia, approve of the use of punishments which violate human rights as defined in the UN declaration of 1948. One example is the hudud (‘limit’) punishments which include amputation of limbs, stoning to death and flogging. Another is the qisas (lex talionis), where punishments consist of

117) The Supervisory Council of the North appoints a judge for each district, choosen from among the ulama for his knowledge and experience of law (ibid:104).
causing similar hurt to the same part of the body of the offender as he has caused to the victim or by causing his death if he has committed a murder. The extent to which these principles of Islamic law are presently applied is unknown but some cases have been reported. Thus, in May 1993 a man convicted of murder under the authority of the local *shura* in Kunar was executed by the father of the victim. This was the third execution in Kunar carried out with explicit reference to the *sharia* and *qisas*. Three similar cases presided over by *Taliban* judges are reported from Kandahar, and others found guilty of murder have only escaped execution by paying blood money to the relatives of the victims. However, such practices do not represent a total reversal of pre-war legal conditions. Even before the war in rural areas like Kunar, the family of a murder victim could also be officially authorised to take revenge and kill the murderer if the authorities could not arrest him – a practice that goes back to the times of Amir Abdur Rahman (Gregorian 1969:138). The *Taliban* have also introduced *hudud* punishments. In Helmand three persons found guilty of highway robbery had their right hand and left foot amputated in public in February 1995.

The question is, to what extent, if at all, human rights as defined by the UN can be accommodated within Islamic law. There is, as argued by Hjärpe (1988), at least potentially a basic incompatibility between the UN Declaration of Human Rights and *Sharia*. Human rights as defined by the UN are based on the unstated premise of secularism, where laws do not derive their authority from any divine source but from consensus among human beings expressed in legislation. In contrast, where the *Sharia* is regarded as the absolute law of God independent of historical conditions, it can be argued that it defines ‘human rights’ since God has created both man and the laws to suit him in the form of *Sharía*. This also seems to be the position held by the authorities in Kabul. Afghanistan has signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, while the *mujaheddin* government has declared that it will respect the country’s international obligations, it maintains at the same time that the holy Koran “... contains the necessary provisions concerning human rights”. Even so, the actual legal practice of the authorities in Kabul or elsewhere in the country will re-

quire interpretation of the *sharia*. Ultimately, the extent to which human rights can be accommodated within the laws of Afghanistan will therefore depend on the political ideology and interests of those who possess the authority to undertake such interpretation.
Refugee Relief and Repatriation

The Exodus

The repression following in the wake of the Communist coup in 1978 forced an increasing number of refugees to flee to Pakistan and Iran.\(^{122}\) With the spread of the resistance against the new regime during 1979, the number of people fleeing became an exodus and, by the time of the Soviet invasion in December 1979, there were already an estimated 300 - 400,000 Afghan refugees in Pakistan. During the early eighties the fighting between the Soviet and Afghan military forces and the *muja-heddin* swelled the number of people fleeing Afghanistan to sanctuaries in Pakistan and Iran. By the second half of the eighties more than five million Afghans had fled the country, while an estimated 800,000 to one million were internally displaced, mostly fleeing the fighting in the rural areas to the cities under government control.\(^{123}\) Thus, the number of refugees roughly equalled one third of Afghanistan’s pre-war population, and if the internal refugees are included the proportion was nearly half of the population. The majority of those fleeing the country sought refugee in Pakistan, where there were estimated to have been around 3.2 million by the mid eighties, while another 2.3 million were reported to be refugees in Iran. In addition, about 100,000 Afghans sought asylum in the USA, Canada, Australia and Europe. These refugees comprised a significant part of the country’s educated elite, whereas around 90 per cent of the refugees in Iran and Pakistan hailed from the rural areas (Van Royen 1990:54).

\(^{122}\) While Iran is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention and its 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees, Pakistan is not.

\(^{123}\) The estimate of internally displaced is from the UNHCR report *Voluntary Repatriation to Afghanistan: 1993 Achievements and 1994 Activities*, August 1994, p.1. Earlier estimates put the number significantly higher. Thus, English (1988:14) gives an estimate of more than 1.5 million, and Knowles (1992:13) one of around two or even as high as three million.
Refugees as a percentage of total population

Although the main exodus took place until the mid-eighties, a new wave of refugees numbering around 100,000 people fled to Pakistan when the mujaheddin launched offensives against major cities like Jalalabad after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. The fierce fighting since the mujaheddin takeover in Kabul generated a new wave of refugees, with several hundred thousand people fleeing the city to avoid the fighting, looting and food shortages.

Due to the registration process, which first involved the tribal leaders (malik) and later the officially recognised resistance parties, there can be little doubt that the number of registered refugees has been inflated. At the same time, the refugee population also comprises a very large number of unregistered refugees, settled both in the camps and elsewhere. As many as 500,000 mainly unregistered refugees are estimated to have settled primarily in Peshawar but also in other cities like Karachi, Rawalpindi and Quetta (Knowles 1992:6). Despite attempts at a re-enumeration in 1981 and 1982, no comprehensive census have ever been undertaken of the refugees. Attempts to do so have been opposed by them since they feared that it might lead to reductions in the rations they were receiving. Concerning Iran, the figures which have been quoted in UN reports are those given by the Iranian authorities and no independent assessments have been made by the UN. It would seem that while the overall figure for refugees in Pakistan is fairly realistic, that for Iran is probably inflated.124

Refugees in Pakistan

The majority of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan were (and are) Pashtuns, who before the repatriation began were estimated to constitute about 70 per cent of the refugees (Christensen & Scott 1988:17).125 Most had fled

124) In the 1986 Census of Iran, the number of Afghan refugees is reported as 755,257. This number does not include the Afghan migrant workers in Iran although these have been recognised by the UNHCR and Teheran as refugees sur place. Even before the war Afghan migrant workers in Iran were estimated to number between 500,000 and one million, and they have continued to move back and forth between the two countries throughout the war. In May 1992 the official Iranian figure for Afghan refugees was threemillion. No reasons have been given for this dramatic increase, but the figure is accepted by UNHCR although it does not tally with other figures giving a breakdown on the distribution of refugees within Iran (Glatzer 1992:4).

125) The First Consolidated Report by UNOCA (Geneva 1988, p. 59) gives an even higher proportion of Pashtuns, namely nearly 85 per cent.
from the eastern and southern provinces of Afghanistan, and many were settled in refugees camps across the border from the areas they had left. In addition to the eastern and southern Pashtuns, there were smaller
groups of Tajik, Uzbek and Turkoman refugees as well as some Pashtuns from the northern provinces. The bulk of the Afghan refugees, about 2.2 million, were residing in the North-West Frontier Province, another 800,000 in Baluchistan, and 200,000 in Punjab. The refugee population were basically a dependent one; 24 per cent were adult men, 28 per cent adult women, and 48 per cent were children under the age of 15 (English 1988:13).

Like the main Afghan refugee group, the overwhelming majority of the population in the NWFP are Pashtuns, and the common language and culture of the refugees and the host population goes a long way towards explaining the extreme generosity with which the Afghan refugees have been received and accepted. This acceptance has not been restricted to the Pakistani government, who had political reasons to accept the refugees during the war against the Communist regime, nor to the many Pakistanis who have benefitted from the considerable influx of money and resources for the support of the refugees, but has also been extended by the population as such. When the Afghan refugees arrived, both the NWFP and Baluchistan were already areas where the natural resource base was fully utilised and where unemployment was high and a considerable out-migration in search of work took place. Despite the added pressure on the environment caused by the Afghan refugees and the resulting ecological degradation, their entry into the market for unskilled labour, their establishment of businesses especially within the transport sector, and the rise in rents caused by their settlement in cities like Peshawar, their presence has not created the kind of conflict with the local population which might have been expected. Although clashes have occasionally taken place between refugees and locals over access to resources, and although the hospitality is now wearing thin and the Pakistani press is increasingly blaming the Afghan refugees for the proliferation of arms and drugs in Pakistan, the general attitude towards the Afghan refugees has nevertheless been that it was an Islamic duty to offer them a safe haven as fellow Muslims.

Apart from the refugees living in rented accommodation in the cities, most of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan have been settled in camps in the NWFP and Baluchistan. Refugees from the same kinship group, village and locality usually fled at the same time, or joined each other in the exile and are residing together in the same settlement. Some of these settlements like the Nazir Bagh and Azakhel camps outside Peshawar housed more than 100,000 refugees. Administratively they were divided into smaller units of around 500 to 10,000 people, through in practice often
containing considerably more. In 1990 there were some 350 such camps, which somewhat misleadingly were called Refugee Tented Villages (RTVs). The registered refugees were given tents on their arrival but within a few months most had built mud houses, and over the years the refugee settlements came to resemble huge villages, lacking only one central element of villages in Afghanistan, namely access to agricultural land. The refugee settlements have therefore been dependent on the external resources they could draw on. Such resources have comprised both the assistance provided by the Pakistani government, the UN and other international relief agencies, incomes from employment and business activities outside the camps, and occasionally also from landholdings in Afghanistan. Throughout the war the refugee settlements have supplied mujaheddin for the resistance struggle in Afghanistan, and have served as sanctuaries to which they could retreat during the winter, when guerilla warfare became impossible in many parts of the country.

At the beginning of the exodus, Pakistan on its own provided the assistance to maintain the refugees. Pakistan appealed to the UN for assistance in April 1979, and since then the UN together with the Pakistani authorities have been involved in a massive operation to take care of the refugees. A special Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees was set up in October 1980 by Pakistan to administer the refugee population and the assistance received through the UN. The role of UNHCR has been to coordinate international aid, and to oversee the implementation of the relief effort but it has had no direct operational tasks. The UN agencies have assisted the Commissionerate in establishing the infrastructure for the refugee settlements including water supply, education, sanitation and storage facilities. Since as many as 75 per cent of the refugees consist of two vulnerable groups, women and children, a large effort has been made to provide adequate health services including preventive health care, health education, and maternal-child health services (Dupree 1987:384). By 1985 the total yearly expenses for the care and maintenance of the refugees exceeded US$ 400 million per year (Jones 1985:9).

Yet, despite the large administrative apparatus and the expense, the refugees have often neither received their scheduled rations on time nor in the quantities they were entitled to (Christensen & Scott 1988:12). Initially, lack of staff compelled Pakistan and the aid agencies to distribute supplies through the maliks, who were also involved in the registration of new arrivals. As it became clear that this system created ‘ration maliks’ who registered fictitious refugees, diverted relief for personal use, and sold refugee goods in local bazaars, the system was abolished in 1980 in
favour of direct distribution to registered families (Dupree 1987:370). However, this did not abolish corruption, which is alleged to have continued through collusion between the resistance parties involved in the registration of most of the refugees and staff from the Commissionerate (Baitenmann 1990: 67). The Commissionerate has tried to curtail the misuse of refugee supplies and on several occasions this has led to the dismissal of staff from the Commissionerate. Moreover, supplies may have been withheld to exert pressure on the refugees to repatriate, though this is denied by both the Pakistani authorities and UNHCR (Ruiz 1992: 8). During 1992, when the mass repatriation took place, there were periods of several months where no food rations were distributed in most of the camps. Even so, it is nevertheless an expression of the overall efficiency of the assistance effort that, since the arrival of the first refugees, no major epidemics and no severe food shortages leading to starvation has occurred among them.

Refugees in Iran

A large proportion of the Afghan refugees in Iran is constituted by Persian-speaking Hazaras from central Afghanistan. Since central Afghanistan remained largely unaffected by the fighting during the Soviet occupation, and since it was a major supplier of migrant labourers to Iran before the war, it is reasonable to assume that many of the Hazara refugees in Iran are in fact migrant labourers. This is also indicated by the demographic character of the refugee population in Iran where, in contrast to those in Pakistan, more than 60 per cent are adult men. Other ethnic groups represented among the refugees include Farsivan, Pashtun, and to a lesser extent Firuskuhi and Taimani.

In Iran, the authorities have themselves directly undertaken both the administration and the care and maintenance of the refugees. Until 1983, the Iranian government bore the entire cost of maintaining the Afghan refugees in the country, amounting to more than US$ 50 million per year.

126) During a trip to Hazara villages in the Qarabagh district of Ghazni province in August 1991, the author was told by Hazara informants that practically every household in the area had at least one male member working in Iran.
128) This figure and those below are from the UNHCR, and quoted from Glatzer (1992).
This figure only covers expenditure for refugee camps, and the total expenditure for refugee assistance including services like health and education will have been considerably higher. From 1983 the UNHCR has supplemented the efforts by the Iranian government with material assistance in kind. The UN contribution in that year was US$ 2.4 million and increased to a peak of US$ 22 million in 1988, after which it dropped to US$ 6 million in 1992 due to decreasing funding from international donors. Since 1985, UNHCR has maintained an office in Teheran but has only had limited access to the refugee camps and, in contrast to Pakistan, international NGOs have not been permitted to operate there. At least until 1992, the policy of the Iranian authorities towards the refugees was fairly liberal and allowed them relatively unrestricted integration with the local population. While some of the Afghan refugees have been residing in camps, most were allowed to settle outside these according to a quota system by province following their registration. The Afghan refugees have had access to the labour market, although with some restrictions, since the quota system meant that they were relocated by the Iranian authorities to areas with labour shortages. The Afghan refugees have also been able to benefit from subsidized food rations, free education and medical care on almost the same footing as Iranian nationals. However, from early 1992 onwards, the Iranian authorities began to dissolve spontaneous Afghan refugee camps and concentrate the refugees in larger camps, presumably in preparation for the subsequent forced repatriation which has pushed a considerable number of refugees across the border into Afghanistan during 1993 and 1994.

Refugee Return

With the signing of the Geneva Accords in April 1988, the first steps were taken towards the repatriation of the Afghan refugees from Pakistan. The Accords contained provisions for setting up joint Afghan-Pakistani commissions for the purpose of an orderly, safe and voluntary repatriation of the refugees. However, no such commissions were ever established and, while the Afghan authorities set up transit centres for

129) In May 1992 the Iranian authorities invited representatives of the Scandinavian Refugee Councils to visit Iran to initiate discussions on NGO assistance to Afghan refugees. This did, however, not lead to any direct involvement in refugee assistance by international NGOs.
returnees, very few refugees did appear to have returned through government controlled areas.
To facilitate and encourage repatriation, the UN together with the Pakistani authorities started a pilot project of three months duration in July 1990. Under this project refugee families willing to return would receive a repatriation grant of Rs. 3,300 as assistance towards their transport costs and 300 kg of wheat to sustain them for three months. In exchange for this assistance the returnees would have to surrender their so-called ‘passbook’ which gave them access to rations as refugees. It was expected that around 40,000 families corresponding to 250,000 persons would return under this scheme.130 While this target was not reached, some repatriation did take place, mostly to areas under mujaheddin control. This return went against the policy of the resistance parties, who held that repatriation should only take place after the fall of the communist regime. It would appear that those refugees who decided that conditions in their home areas permitted them to return simply ignored this policy, as they had in the past ignored government decisions which did not correspond with their interests. During the second half of 1990, around 13,000 families availed themselves of the UN repatriation grant and another 33,000 families exchanged their passbooks in 1991


Figure 6: Refugees returning home, Khost in Paktia, June 1992
against a forecast of 50,000. The number of refugees who actually repatriated after cashing their ‘passbooks’ is not known since at this stage the UN had not yet established monitoring at the principal crossing points. Many of those who held several ‘passbooks’ seem to have availed themselves of the opportunity to turn these into wheat and cash. Yet, by the end of 1991, UNHCR estimated that at least 300,000 refugees had returned. The forecast for 1992 was that 50,000 families would return. Like the earlier forecasts, that for 1992 was also proved wrong by events but this time for a different reason. The collapse of the Kabul regime in April 1992 triggered one of the most rapid and massive cases of repatriation the world has ever witnessed. Around 1.2 million refugees returned home that year from Pakistan and another 200,000 from Iran, increasing the total number of returnees to 1.7 million.

With the aid of hindsight it is maybe possible clearer to assess the factors influencing the issue of repatriation. Following the limited success of the repatriation scheme in 1990 and 1991, the UN had begun to consider what measures could be taken if the earlier assumption of large scale repatriation turned out to be unrealistic and instead a large proportion of the refugees chose to remain in the host countries. Yet, the mass repatria-

---

tion during 1992 and earlier smaller instances of concentrated repatriation to specific localities confirmed attitudes stated by the refugees themselves, namely that the decisive factors influencing their decisions regarding repatriation were peace, security and the prospects of managing economically in the areas of return (Glatzer 1990:46). Thus, both the actual pattern of repatriation and the stated attitudes of the refugees support the view that most do in fact intend to return if conditions are conducive to this, although a large and possibly increasing number will probably remain in the host countries.

As many as 70 per cent of the refugees are estimated to have been farmers in Afghanistan (Christensen & Scott 1988:8). As mentioned above, the large majority of the refugees come from the Pashtun areas of eastern Afghanistan, which were dominated by small landholdings. Since the refugees were often to be found among the more wealthy members of the local community, who could afford the costs involved in the migration and may also have had most to fear from the Kabul authorities, it seems safe to assume that a significant proportion of the refugees are farmers who cultivated their own land in Afghanistan. Land ownership is a key element in the social identity of the Afghans and in particular of the Pashtuns. In Pakistan the refugees are not allowed to buy and own land. Their main source of income apart from rations has been unskilled and usually intermittent labour, which yields a very meagre income and is considered of far lower status than farming one’s own land.\textsuperscript{133} For the bulk of the refugees, a return to Afghanistan is therefore the only option if they are to improve their economic situation and reestablish their social status and self esteem.

Although the overall scale of return in 1990 and 1991 was fairly limited, the pattern of return was revealing and anticipated what took place from April 1992 onwards. While most of the refugees returned to areas under mujaheddin control, it was predominantly to areas which were considered peaceful and safe. Thus, very soon after the fall of the town of Khost to the mujaheddin in early April 1991, delegations of elders from tribal groups that had fled to Pakistan in the early eighties began to arrive in Peshawar to obtain assistance from the aid agencies to resettle in their home villages. Most of the countryside outside the government controlled area around Khost had suffered very extensive destruction and had been almost completely depopulated. As a first step towards repatriation

\textsuperscript{133} Thus, while two thirds of the male refugees between 18 and 49 years of age had some form of gainful employment, about half were casual labourers who were only able to find work for 16 to 18 days per month (Christensen & Scott 1988:9).
groups of men from the different tribal segments returned from refugee camps in Kurram and North Waziristan to take possession of their villages and to start reconstruction work. Irrigation canals were repaired and crops were planted. Later in 1991 and especially in 1992 after the first harvest, the reconstruction of houses began, and this was followed by the return of women and children. By the summer of 1993 – about two years after the return of the first groups of male refugees – most of the villages were re-populated and the lands under cultivation. This remarkable recovery was no doubt facilitated and encouraged by the assistance provided by the aid agencies, but it would probably have taken place even without external help, though at a slower pace, because the people had no other alternative if they were to improve their existence.

However, while rehabilitation assistance may ease the return of refugees, no amount of assistance will promote this if the area in question is not considered safe by the refugees. The province of Kunar bordering Pakistan came under mujaheddin control as early as October 1988. Since access to Kunar was comparatively easy compared with most other areas then under mujaheddin control, it became for the next couple of years one of the main areas for rehabilitation assistance from international agencies. Kunar had suffered extensive destruction during the war, though not to the same extent as the Khost region, and about 80 per cent of the original population were settled in refugee camps right across the border in the tribal agency of Bajaur in Pakistan. Yet, despite the extensive assistance and despite the proximity of its refugees, Kunar did not experience the same kind of repatriation witnessed in the Khost region. Even after the fall of the Kabul regime, repatriation to Kunar continued to be lower than to other provinces in eastern Afghanistan.

The main reason for this was the continuing political instability in the area, where rival resistance parties and commanders appeared to wield more political influence than was the case in Khost. The political rivalry culminated when severe fighting broke out in the autumn of 1991 among the main contestants, the Wahabi supported Salafi and the Hizb-e Islami of Hekmatyar. The fighting, which was accompanied by looting, drove some returnees back across the border to Pakistan and made those in Pakistan hesitant to return to their home villages.

Another consequence of the political influence of mujaheddin commanders in Kunar which has restricted refugee return was the takeover of lands in the fertile main valley areas belonging either to refugees in Pakistan or to people who had fled along with the Afghan government forces. The commanders set themselves up as new feudal landowners. Although
repatriation to Kunar seems to have increased since political conditions became more stable during 1994, there are still refugees from the main valley areas who have not returned since their land is controlled by others. Such takeovers of land are also reported to have happened in the Nimruz province in the south-west, and in northern Afghanistan (Knowles 1992:31).

Apart from direct seizure of land, other factors concerning land ownership and access to land also have a significant bearing on whether a return is feasible and on the security situation in the area of return. During the more than ten years that many refugees have spent in exile, inheritance cases involving land have remained unresolved. This is often a source of conflict after the return, when the land has to be divided among different claimants. Since the land in many areas has remained uncultivated through most of the war, the boundaries of fields have disappeared, and this constitutes another source of quarrel. Thus, during one month in the summer of 1992, more than 30 men were killed mainly due to land disputes among the few thousand members of the Manduzai tribe who had by then returned to their home villages in the Khost area.

Adding to the frequency and seriousness of such land disputes is the population increase, that has taken place among the refugees during their exile. As mentioned above, a very large proportion – some 60 per cent – of the refugees are juveniles below 18 years and the rate of population increase among the refugees is believed to be as high or even higher than the 3.2 per cent in the Pakistani population. A large number of refugees who were children when their families fled to Pakistan have grown up in exile and have married there. Not surprisingly, this population increase fuels the conflicts over land, especially in eastern Afghanistan where agricultural land is scarce and most holdings are small. Quite often the existing villages are simply not large enough to accommodate all the returning families. Where this is the case, new settlements may be established, usually situated on uncultivable land at a distance from the old village. Such lands were previously used for grazing, and can have been utilized by two or more villages related by tribal links. The establishment of new settlements is therefore a potential source of conflict, and during 1992 and 1993 a number of clashes over land rights involving heavy

---
134) Christensen & Scott (1988:26) and Centlivres & Centlivres-Demont (1992:8). The last source also quotes surveys which show that 22 per cent of the Afghan refugees are under 5 years of age. Children in this age group born during the exile are not included in any statistics on the number of refugees.
weapons like tanks and artillery took place between villages in the Khost region.

It is likely that the population increase among the refugees and the increasing scarcity of agricultural land will prevent some refugees from returning to Afghanistan. Since at present there is hardly any employment opportunities in Afghanistan outside agriculture apart from that of mujahed, many refugee families choose what one could call partial repatriation. Those members who have found gainful employment or have started a viable business will remain in Pakistan, while the others will return to manage the landholding on behalf of the whole family. In this way the final option between residence in Pakistan and Afghanistan is kept open, and the economic viability of the family as a whole is optimised. This is also the reason why many returning families have not availed themselves of the UNHCR repatriation grant, but have kept their ‘passbooks’ if they were to return to Pakistan. However, such diversification of opportunities is not something new. In the border areas there were also many Afghan families, who before the war had members residing across the border in Pakistan or working in the Gulf States as is also the case now.

In addition to the insecurity caused by political rivalry or land disputes, mines constitute another serious threat to the returning refugees. During the war an estimated 10 million mines of every conceivable type were used, primarily by the Soviet and Afghan armed forces but to a lesser extent also by the resistance. Most of the mines were used in the border provinces from where the majority of the refugees fled and along the main roads towards the former Soviet Union in the north and Iran in the west.\textsuperscript{135} While the danger posed by mines did not deter people from returning after the fall of the Kabul regime in early 1992, the costs have been high. It is estimated that around 8,000 people lose their lives or are seriously injured in mine accidents every year and, while this figure is likely to decrease over time, mines will in all probability continue to be a threat for the next couple of generations.

**Repatriation or Local Settlement**

How many refugees who will remain in Pakistan is impossible to assess at present. Estimates (or rather guesstimates) vary, but some reckon that

more than one million will stay (Centlivres & Centlivres-Demont 1992:33). The figure may run into several hundred thousand, but it seems unlikely that the majority of the remaining refugees will stay on in Pakistan if a political settlement is finally reached between the rival mujaheddin parties and the security situation in Afghanistan improves. The repatriation which has taken place so far from the camps has shown that this is a cumulative process. When a significant part of the refugees from a specific village or kinship group have returned, a threshold is reached where those remaining find life in the camp too insecure and follow those who have left. At the same time, not all those who have established themselves economically in Pakistan will remain. In the months following the collapse of the Kabul regime in 1992, most of the Afghan buses and trucks, which had up till then virtually dominated the transport business in Peshawar, moved back to Afghanistan. Many have since then returned to Pakistan due to the deteriorating security conditions and the increasing lawlessness along Afghanistan’s highways.

Certain groups of refugees, however, face obstacles which may prevent their return to Afghanistan. One comprises those poor refugee families who cannot afford the costs required for their return and who, since they were never registered, cannot avail themselves of the UN repatriation grant. Another group is those among the so-called ‘vulnerable refugees’, like widows and disabled, who have no family to support them. The third group is the estimated 100,000 Afghans, which include a large proportion of the country’s former educated and political elite, who are now residing in the West. Unless these people are able to return to something which resembles the positions and status they held before their exile, most will probably prefer to remain in the security and relative comfort of their present host countries. In addition, those who have children undergoing an education in their host countries will hardly be attracted by the prospects of a return to a country where the educational system is in a shambles. The mujaheddin view such refugees with suspicion since they did not participate actively in the jihad, and it seems unlikely that the new power holders will relinquish their newly-won positions of influence to facilitate the return of the old elite. Finally, Pashtun refugees from the north appear to be reluctant to return to a situation where their position as a minority is no longer protected by a Pashtun-dominated government. Moreover, those Pashtun refugees from the North who were nomads have often lost their flocks and may not be permitted to use their former pastures, while those who were farmers may also have lost their lands. Instances are reported where Uzbek militia commanders have seized Pashtun lands and are opposing their return (Knowles 1992:32). So while
the Uzbek, Turkoman and Tajik refugees from Northern Afghanistan returned during 1992, most of the Pashtuns stayed back in Pakistan.

The upsurge of fighting in and around Kabul in 1993, which intensified throughout 1994, reduced the scale of repatriation significantly compared with the mass return of 1992. During 1993 around 680,000 refugees returned in almost equal numbers from Pakistan and Iran. According to yet unreleased figures from UNHCR, close to 329,000 refugees returned to Afghanistan during 1994. Of these around 103,000 returned from Pakistan and 227,000 from Iran.

UNHCR has continued the policy of providing a repatriation grant to returning refugees in return for their ‘passbooks’, which began in 1990. For refugees from Pakistan, who normally comprise whole families, this assistance still comprises 300 kg of wheat and Rs. 3,300 per family. In contrast, refugees from Iran, who are often single males, are provided with individual assistance amounting to 50 kg of wheat and the equivalent of US$ 25 in local currency per person. In addition, UNHCR and UNDP have implemented what they call ‘quick impact projects’ through various NGOs to support the re-settlement of the refugees after their return. These are small projects comprising repair of irrigation systems and roads, provision of drinking water, and assistance with reconstruction of houses which can be implemented within a relatively short time-frame and require only a one-time investment. Despite the name, these projects are similar to those otherwise undertaken by agencies including those of the UN involved in the rehabilitation of rural areas in Afghanistan. The name reflects a new approach to what in the aid jargon is called ‘donor fatigue’ rather than to repatriation. The UN agencies have been faced with an increasing reluctance by international donors to continue to fund projects for Afghan refugees, and this has resulted in an increasing pressure on the UN to find, if not solutions to the problem of repatriation, then at least new ways of attracting donor funding.

The combination of this pressure and diminishing funding has forced the UNHCR to reconsider its existing care and maintenance program for the refugees. Rations have already been reduced drastically and, apart from wheat and occasional supplies of edible oil, all other food items like powdered milk, sugar and tea are no longer supplied. The wheat rations, which form the staple in the Afghan diet, have been reduced from 15 kg per month per person to 10 kg. This food ration was to be halved again by January 1995 and be terminated completely by September as would be the assistance for services like education and health.136 The repatriation pol-

---

icy is likewise being reconsidered, and the repatriation grant will probably not continue beyond 1995.

UNHCR maintains that these policy changes should not be seen as measures to push the refugees back to Afghanistan, but reflects the increasing economic integration of the remaining refugees in the Pakistani economy. On the basis of a survey from March 1994, which is not yet released, it is argued that, since rations on the average only constitute about 25 per cent of the income of the refugees, the phasing out of this assistance will not have severe consequences for their livelihood.\footnote{137} This conclusion is arguable. In the most comprehensive survey of Afghan refugees undertaken, it was concluded that “... about 70 per cent of the (refugee) households would, in the absence of ... assistance, have insufficient income for bare essentials” (Christensen & Scott 1988:48). Although conditions may have changed since this survey was carried out, and a larger proportion of the refugees may now be in a position to fend for themselves, the consequences of terminating the rations appear highly uncertain.

To a certain extent this is also reflected in the new UNHCR policy. With the phasing out of the rations, increased assistance will be targeted to vulnerable groups, defined as families without able-bodied male members. The type of projects this assistance will comprise has not yet been decided but will be part of a strategy aimed at what UNHCR terms ‘consolidation of self-sufficiency’. This strategy will also aim at supporting the establishment of mechanisms among other refugees so that they themselves can generate the funds required to operate and maintain common facilities like water supply, health services and education. Underlying this whole approach is the expectation that a significant proportion of the refugees remaining in Pakistan will not return to Afghanistan and therefore should be enabled to settle and manage on their own in Pakistan.

The prospect that the care and maintenance programme for Afghan refugees will be phased out and especially that UNHCR will promote what it calls ‘local settlement’ of part of the remaining 1 to 1.2 million Afghan refugees has raised strong objections from the Pakistani authorities.\footnote{138} While the Afghan refugees were a political asset in terms of Pakistan’s international relations during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Pakistan now considers the refugees a domestic political liability,

\footnotetext[137]{The conclusion of this study was presented in a UNHCR press release quoted in \textit{The News} on 1 August 1994 in the article ‘UNHCR not to abandon Pakistan’.

\footnotetext[138]{\textit{The News}: ‘UN may stop aid for Afghans’, 11 July 1994. The Pakistani authorities also maintain that the number of refugees remaining in Pakistan is higher than the UN figure, namely 1.6 million (\textit{The News}, 2 April 1995).}
which if repatriation does not take place could lead to a Palestinian situation. A high-level Pakistani delegation visited UNHCR in Geneva in early October 1994 to clarify Pakistan’s stand on the issue, namely that for both political and economic reasons it cannot accept ‘local settlement’, that it expects international assistance for the refugees to continue, and that in addition to such assistance it requires funding to the tune of US$ 208 million for projects to deal with the environmental degradation caused by the refugees.\(^{139}\) To prevent the planned termination of the UN care and maintenance program for the refugees, the Pakistani administration has asked the UNHCR for a renegotiation of the agreement regarding the program.\(^{140}\) Parallel to this, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has directed the involved Pakistani authorities to develop a policy that will encourage the voluntary return of the refugees to Afghanistan. Key elements of this policy are the realisation that the refugees cannot be pushed back but that peace in Afghanistan is a precondition for repatriation and that increased efforts should be undertaken to support reconstruction in the areas of return to attract the refugees back.\(^{141}\)

On the policy level, Benazir Bhutto’s initiative is not something new. However, its intentions are incompatible with the present policy of the Pakistani authorities regarding the relief and rehabilitation activities currently being undertaken in Afghanistan. Since January 1994, restrictions have been placed on the transport from Pakistan to Afghanistan of the supplies that are necessary for both relief and reconstruction projects. Permits for such supplies as food, cement and steel were formerly issued through the Commissionerate in Peshawar but now have to be obtained in Islamabad. Why these restrictions were imposed is not clear. They do not appear to be related to any change in policy regarding rehabilitation in Afghanistan or the refugees, but seems to be the fallout of the power struggle between Benazir Bhutto’s central government and the opposition-ruled provincial government of the NWFP, which was suspended in January 1994. In connection with this, the authority of the Commissionerate in Peshawar was also reduced in favour of Islamabad.

---

The New Refugees from Kabul

With the assumption of power by the mujaheddin in Kabul in April 1992, refugees from Pakistan not only began to return to the rural areas but also to the capital itself. Kabul had hardly been touched by the war and was fully intact. However, the initial optimism soon evaporated. Over the summer Kabul descended into complete lawlessness where looting and theft became the order of the day, and frequent clashes took place between rival mujaheddin groups culminating in large-scale fighting in August. As a result, refugees no longer returned to Kabul but rather people started to flee the city in increasing numbers from August 1992 onwards.

The number of refugees from Kabul is unknown, but runs into several hundreds of thousands. During the eighties, the population of Kabul had increased considerably due to a massive influx of refugees fleeing the fighting in the rural areas. With the eruption of fighting in Kabul itself, many of these refugees moved back to the areas they had originally fled from. Others, who were either too closely associated with the former regime or who could not draw on any tribal relationships in the countryside to afford them protection, fled to the former Soviet Central Asian republics. By September 1992 an estimated eight to ten thousand such persons had fled to these countries. Another 27,000 refugees from Kabul are reported to have settled in Mazar-i Sharif.

However, most of the refugees fleeing Kabul moved east in an attempt to seek sanctuary in Pakistan. Since they had experienced the looting in Kabul, and since many had been the victims of further extortion at mujaheddin checkposts during their flight, they had no wish to stay on in Afghanistan. By the end of August 1992 more than 52,000 new refugees had arrived in Pakistan, and their numbers increased dramatically day by day. Faced with a new enormous influx of refugees, the Pakistani authorities sealed the border to further arrivals on 28. August. Only people with ‘proper travel documents’, which were virtually impossible to obtain, were from then on allowed into Pakistan. Although a substantial number of refugees without passports or visas were subsequently either

143) The News: ‘Fleeing Afghans stranded at Torkham as Pakistan seals border’, 29 August 1992. The article mentions that the Afghan ministry of the interior in charge of issuing passports was no longer functioning and that the Interior Minister himself was staying in Peshawar.
allowed to enter Pakistan or bribed their way across the border, the bulk of the refugees fleeing Kabul were forced to remain in Afghanistan.

To deal with the refugees coming out of Kabul, a meeting was held on 26 August on the initiative of the Pakistani Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees with UN agencies and NGOs to discuss the establishment of refugee camps close to Jalalabad in the Nangarhar province. Faced with what was in reality a fait accompli, the international agencies, some of whom were already involved in providing relief to refugees around Jalalabad, had to accept the idea. A delegation from the Commissionerate went to Afghanistan to select sites for two camps with the Jalalabad authorities. As more refugees kept arriving during 1993 and 1994, two additional camps were established outside Jalalabad.

By the end of 1994, unreleased figures from the UNHCR estimate around 260,000 refugees to be settled in four camps around Jalalabad. The most recent of these, the Hissar Shahi camp, is located on a stony waterless plain about 20 km east of Jalalabad. The area had to be de-mined before the refugees could settle there. It now contains an estimated 124,000 refugees. They are supported entirely through relief provided by the UN and a number of NGOs, working under much more difficult conditions than were the case in Pakistan with its functioning infrastructure and administration. In addition, another 250,000 persons are estimated to be living in private homes and public buildings in the Jalalabad area.

In Pakistan more refugees keep arriving even though the Pakistani authorities once again closed the border in mid-January 1994, after 16,000 refugees had entered the country within a two-week period following the outbreak of severe fighting in Kabul on 1 January. Due to practical difficulties, all registration of new arrivals was suspended from April. The number of refugees from Kabul who are settled in Pakistan is therefore not known but estimates range from 75,000 to 100,000.

The new arrivals from Kabul represent an entirely new refugee problem caused by a new conflict. Unlike the ‘old’ refugees, their flight cannot be interpreted in a way that supports their self esteem as participants in a jihad. They are simply the victims of a war in which they have no stake. Whereas the ‘old’ refugees possess the skills and the tenacity to re-establish the agrarian economy they have left, the refugees from Kabul will probably require far more external assistance to rebuild the urban environment they have fled from. In contrast to the ‘old’ refugees, at least those new refugees who are trapped in Afghanistan have no possibilities of supplementary incomes but are totally dependent on the aid provided by international community.
This also applies to many of those who have stayed on in Kabul. Large parts of the city are now in ruins, and virtually all public services have collapsed. At the beginning of 1994, of the around 800,000 people remaining in Kabul, an estimated 50,000 displaced persons lived in public buildings and completely dependent on food aid, while another 250,000 displaced people were living with other families for whom food shortages were becoming increasingly serious. Only around mid-February 1995, when the Taliban had driven the forces of Hekmatyar out of Wardak, did large-scale food supplies begin to reach Kabul from the south. At the same time the UN began work to restore the water supply in the eastern parts of the city and to undertake de-mining. Yet, the fighting between the Taliban and Rabbani’s forces has again closed access from the south, although the Taliban have announced that they will not prevent food supplies from reaching the city. Access from the east remains blocked by Hizb-e Islami, and in the north Dostam is said to have blocked the Salang highway across the Hindu Kush.

An Uncertain Future

Peace and security, which is a precondition for the return of the ‘old’ as well as the ‘new’ refugees, remains elusive. Although it has not stopped completely, the scale of repatriation of the ‘old’ refugees has declined drastically. At the same time, the UN and the Pakistani government have not been able to reach a consensus regarding a long-term strategy to deal with the refugee issue. Pakistan’s own approach to the refugees is not consistent with its stated policy, and as a result the ongoing international assistance to rehabilitate Afghanistan and promote the resettlement of returning refugees is impeded. Yet, the repatriation which has taken place so far strongly indicates that the bulk of the remaining ‘old’ refugees will eventually return if and when they perceive that the security situation in their home areas permits this. Whether intended or not, the planned reductions in refugee assistance by the UN are likely to put pressure on the refugees to return. The reductions in direct assistance for the refugees are planned to be paralleled by increased assistance for rehabilitation in Afghanistan. However, it is anticipated that by the end of 1997, the

144) UN consolidated inter-agency appeal for humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan, New York, April 1994, p. 2.
146) ACBAR News Summary, April 1995.
UNHCR will have phased out its activities in Afghanistan in favour of the development oriented agencies of the UN.\(^{147}\)

In Iran, the authorities started a forced repatriation of Afghan refugees in the summer of 1993. Not all the refugees who returned were forced to do so but, according to some of those who were, they were rounded up, put on buses and taken to the Afghan border without any chance of settling their affairs or bringing their property with them. The UNHCR claims to have “... intervened at all levels with a measure of success” vis-a-vis the Iranian authorities.\(^{148}\) Nevertheless, the forced repatriation is reported to have continued in 1994 and is likely to be stepped up during 1995. The Iranian government has declared that it will cancel the temporary residence permits of around 400 to 500,000 Afghan refugees.\(^{149}\)

Although some of the refugees from Kabul have begun to return back after the Rabbani government has pushed its opponents out of the city beyond the range of rocketing, the bulk of the ‘new’ refugees are likely to be wary of returning until a more stable situation has developed. Until then, a massive effort is required to provide both the refugees and the inhabitants of the devastated city with the food, medical aid and shelter necessary to relieve their plight.

---

From Solidarity and Relief to Rehabilitation and Development

Shortly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, the first voluntary non-government organisations (NGOs) began to assist the Afghans. Such assistance has comprised relief and later care and maintenance for the Afghan refugees; clandestine support for the population inside Afghanistan during the war; support for the resettlement of Afghan refugees through rehabilitation and development projects in Afghanistan from the time when repatriation was expected to begin; and attempts to generate support for the Afghans from the governments and the public in the home countries of the international NGOs. Some NGOs have performed all of these roles while others have only engaged in one or two. The NGOs comprise international agencies from Europe, USA, Australia, Japan and the Islamic world, as well as an increasing number of agencies founded and run by the Afghans themselves. While some NGOs were established international humanitarian agencies that were also engaged in similar assistance elsewhere, others were created specifically as solidarity and advocacy organisations to provide assistance for the Afghans. Some NGOs have obtained a substantial part or most of their funding through their parent office in their home countries, while others have been entirely dependent on the funding they received from international donors in Pakistan. Among these donors the most important are the UN agencies, the European Union, some Gulf countries and the USA, which until recently was by far the largest bilateral donor.

NGOs and Refugee Relief

NGOs began providing emergency relief in the form of food, shelter and health care to Afghan refugees in Pakistan as early as 1979. After the Soviet invasion, when it became clear that the refugees were going to
remain in exile for a considerable period, the emphasis shifted from emergency assistance to care and maintenance. In 1982 there were around 12 international NGOs and a couple of Pakistani non-government agencies working for the refugees. By the end of 1989, when repatriation was still limited and the number of NGOs involved in refugee assistance was at its peak, it had increased to more than 40 agencies.

Over the years these NGOs have given very significant contributions to the welfare of the refugees. Their activities have ranged from emergency assistance over projects promoting the self-reliance and capacity for future participation by the refugees in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, to primary education, medical care and health education for women. Through such projects the NGOs have both supplemented the assistance provided by the UN agencies and worked directly as implementing agencies for the UN. When in the early eighties it became clear that existing Pakistani government agencies did not have the capacity or motivation to act as implementing agencies in the provision of such services as water supply, the UN instead began to rely on NGOs to carry out such activities.

The War and Solidarity Organisations

In addition to the assistance for the refugees, a substantial number of NGOs provided assistance to the population in mujaheddin-controlled areas in Afghanistan. The first of these was Medicins sans Frontieres (MSF), which started working inside Afghanistan in 1980. Other French NGOs soon followed as did organisations from Austria, Sweden, Norway, Britain, Belgium and Holland. With the exception of a few agencies like MSF, which also undertook projects in other areas of conflict around the world, most of the NGOs operating inside Afghanistan during the war were the solidarity and advocacy organisations established in Europe, the USA and Islamic world after the Soviet invasion. Their objective was to support the Afghan population in their resistance against the occupation forces and Kabul regime. Politically, these NGOs represented a wide spectrum ranging from extreme right wing organisations, primarily motivated by an anti-Communist agenda, to agencies with a broad political basis and a humanitarian mandate.

Most of these agencies operated from Peshawar while a few were established in Quetta. They were known as ‘cross-border NGOs’ in contrast to those working with refugees in Pakistan. Until the late eighties only a few NGOs worked with both refugee and cross-border projects. Most of
the cross-border NGOs worked from Pakistan without permission, through apparently with the tacit acceptance of the Pakistani authorities. A certain tension existed between the two types of agencies. Those working inside Afghanistan held that their work was ultimately more useful than that of the refugee agencies, since they saw it as a way to help people stay on in Afghanistan and avoid becoming refugees. On the other hand at least some of the refugee NGOs had no wish to become involved in clandestine activities in Afghanistan, and were wary of the close relations with the Afghan resistance that were an unavoidable consequence of such work.

Although more than fifty NGOs are reported to have been involved in cross-border projects at one time or another, the scale of assistance remained relatively modest until the mid-eighties (Baitenmann 1990:71). A number of agencies like MSF ran clinics staffed with expatriate doctors either permanently or on a temporary basis, and other NGOs like the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) supplied medicines and funds for clinics staffed by Afghans, while the French agency AVICEN conducted vaccination campaigns. From 1984 the SCA also supported an increasing number of schools with teaching materials and funds for the teacher’s salaries. Towards the mid-eighties, IRC also began supporting education inside Afghanistan in addition to its refugee projects (Lorentz 1987:10). However, most of the assistance consisted of the so-called ‘cash-for-food’ projects. These were donations of money to enable the population in resistance-controlled areas to buy food and remain in their home areas, where the crops were frequently destroyed by Soviet and Afghan government forces as part of their counter-insurgency strategy.

It was only from September 1986 onwards, when the resistance started to use US-supplied Stinger missiles, that the threat of air attacks decreased to a level where NGOs found that they could begin to undertake small rural reconstruction and development projects in addition to those mentioned above. Among the first agencies to do so were the French MADERA and the Austrian Relief Committee, while the SCA in addition to such projects also undertook a large-scale survey of agricultural conditions during 1987. Even so, the ‘cash-for-food’ assistance remained by far the largest component of cross-border aid until 1988, when it was more or less equalled by assistance to each of the three sectors of agriculture, infrastructure and health.150

150) Overview of NGO assistance to the people of Afghanistan, ACBAR, Peshawar March 1990, p. 4.
Enter the United States

In addition to its military assistance channelled through the Pakistan army and intelligence service and its assistance for the refugees, the USA also became involved in non-military cross-border assistance from the mid-eighties. A separate USAID office was established for Afghanistan to administer the US ‘Cross-border humanitarian assistance program’. This became by far the largest cross-border operation providing around 250 million dollars worth of aid between 1985 and 1989 (Baitenmann 1990:75). From 1989 to 1993 the yearly funding of cross-border assistance was between 60 and 100 million dollars. The US assistance comprised three components. One was donations of wheat to resistance-controlled areas. Another consisted of transport of humanitarian supplies – such as medicines donated by either the US government or American NGOs from the USA to Pakistan – and of Afghan war wounded from Pakistan to hospitals in the USA, Europe and the Middle East for free medical treatment. The third component was assistance for cross-border projects implemented either by NGOs or for the most part through the seven-party Alliance (ibid). The American assistance comprised food, commodities and cash, as well as funding for educational materials and services, basic health services, agricultural rehabilitation and inputs, and repair of the road system (Weinbaum 1989:296).

The use of the seven-party Alliance and, from early 1989 of its successor, the Afghan Interim Government (AIG), despite their inefficiency and corruption, represented an attempt by the US administration to strengthen these political bodies and to enable them to develop the capacity to undertake civil governmental functions. Before the 1978 coup, USAID had been involved in agricultural assistance programs and the USA had also provided assistance for the Faculties of Agriculture and Engineering at the University of Kabul. This experience was utilised in the cross-border projects and the attempt to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Alliance and the AIG. Two allegedly Afghan NGOs, namely VITA and ACLU, which in reality were managed by USAID, were established as contractor agencies for agricultural and construction projects.\(^{151}\) These agencies were supposed to form the nucleus of the future ministries of agriculture and public works. Most of their key Afghan staff were people educated at the US-supported faculties at Kabul university who had

---

151) VITA stands for ‘Volunteers in Technical Assistance’ and ACLU for ‘Afghan Construction Logistics Unit’.
fled to the USA after the coup. They were now brought back to assist the reconstruction of their country – the only example to date where a significant number of the Afghan educated elite has returned to participate in this effort. Although none of these agencies were to contribute to Afghan governmental institution building, since neither the Alliance nor the AIG were able or willing to make use of them, they all undertook extensive cross-border projects. In addition to these two agencies, the Houston-based American Manufacturers Export Group was selected to handle the commodity assistance, the Management Sciences for Health for projects in the health field, and the University of Nebraska at Omaha was the education contractor.

Parallel to this attempt at institution building, USAID also undertook extensive funding of NGOs involved in cross-border projects. Such funding has been provided both to European NGOs like the SCA and the British Afghanaid, and to a growing number of American NGOs involved in cross-border assistance. Since many European NGOs could not for political reasons accept US government funds, the International Rescue Committee was used as an intermediary funding agency.

**Enter the United Nations**

Throughout the war, the Soviet-supported regime in Kabul had retained its seat in the General Assembly of the United Nations. The UN normally only undertakes programs with the approval of the concerned government and the cooperation of its officials, and with only one exception the UN agencies in Kabul did not undertake any projects in mujaheddin controlled areas during the war.\(^{152}\) The signing of the Geneva Accords in April 1989 meant an end to this policy.

Since most the international aid agencies including the UN expected the Kabul regime to fall shortly after the Soviet withdrawal, initiatives were taken both to assist the anticipated large-scale repatriation of the refugees and to start reconstruction in Afghanistan. The UN general secretary launched an international appeal calling for 1,166 million dollars to cover expenses for repatriation and reconstruction during the initial 18-month period. At a subsequent donor conference in October 1988, close to 1,000 million dollars were pledged. However, despite the positive do-

---

152) The exception was a UNICEF immunisation project aimed at children, which was approved by all parties to the conflict in 1987 (Weinbaum 1989:297).
nor response to the appeal, UN activities have suffered from a consistent lack of resources. Later appeals have only been able to generate limited funds since the initial donor expectations of a new unified government in Kabul and massive repatriation were not fulfilled. Major donors thus withheld their funding pending clearer evidence of significant refugee return (Knowles 1992:42). In addition, most of the pledges have been for aid in kind primarily for the WFP, and only limited non-earmarked cash contributions have been available. This has seriously impaired the ability of the UN to react with the necessary flexibility to the needs in Afghanistan.153

In May 1988 Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan was appointed as UN co-ordinator for the relief and reconstruction activities.154 A special Office of the Coordinator for United Nations Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Programmes relating to Afghanistan (UNOCA) was established to bring together the efforts of the different UN agencies, NGOs, and involved donor countries.155 At the donor conference in October the whole effort was named ‘Operation Salam’.

The UN expected the NGOs to have a significant role as implementing agencies.156 However, then as later there were delays in the planning by UN agencies and this meant that the NGOs, who were ultimately to implement these plans, could not themselves plan since they did not know when they would receive funding for approved proposals if at all (Lawrence 1990:5). Such uncertainty could even apply to the continuation of ongoing projects, which could be subject to funding gaps of several months. For the majority of NGOs, who did not have untied funds that could be used to bridge the delays in UN funding, this created repeated difficulties.

To a large extent such problems were an expression of the limitations to which the UN offices in Pakistan were themselves subjected. Approval of plans, budgets, and expenditure had to be made at headquarters in New York, Geneva or Rome and took time to finalise. Funds once approved for specific projects could not be transferred to other projects or geographical areas if conditions changed, and the decision-making authority delegated to the UN staff at the Pakistan level was limited. The result was that, in

154) He was succeeded in 1993 by Sotirios Mousouris.
155) In 1993 UNOCA was placed under the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and renamed UNOCHA: the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan.
addition to the restrictions deriving from the composition of the funds pledged to the UN, the bureaucratic setup of the UN system itself also militated against the flexibility necessary for the provision of assistance in the extremely fluid environment of Afghanistan.

The problems were compounded by inter-agency rivalry. The specialised agencies found it difficult to accept the coordinating role of UNOCA. It would appear that especially UNDP found its traditional role undermined, since under normal conditions UNDP is the official UN body that coordinates the activities of other UN agencies in a particular country and represents them in relation to the authorities. Since control over both project funding and the projects themselves became elements in this rivalry, the result was to create further uncertainty among the NGOs (Lawrence 1990:12). Moreover, the fact that donors were allocating a considerable part of the funds pledged for Afghanistan directly to the specialised UN agencies like UNHCR, UNDP and UNICEF, and not to UNOCA, also limited its ability to back with real authority its attempts to coordinate. Today UNOCA (now UNOCHA) appears to have restricted its coordinating role to emergency assistance and has left the different specialised UN agencies to play the lead role within their traditional fields.

Figure 8: Repair of an irrigation canal, Khost in Paktia, December 1991
Despite the problems inherent in dealing with the UN, many of the NGOs with previous experience of cross-border projects started working with it as implementing agencies. So did several other NGOs which until then had only been involved in assistance to refugees, but now began the far-from-easy exercise of starting up cross-border rehabilitation projects. By the autumn of 1989 NGOs were implementing twenty different UN-funded projects. Mainly these had been started to support the revival of agricultural production through the repair of irrigation systems, veterinary services and the provision of agricultural inputs such as seed and fertilizer. Such projects were followed by others within the health field comprising immunisation, training of health workers and provision of water supply. During the next couple of years the number of projects expanded and by late 1990 a total of 43 NGOs were receiving UN funding.

Figure 9: Distribution of improved wheat seed and fertilizer, Narang in Kunar, October 1990

Afghan NGOs

By the late eighties, when the UN-supported rehabilitation effort in Afghanistan began, hardly any of the cross-border NGOs were willing to consider working in areas controlled by the Kabul regime. To assist those areas in Northern, Western and Central Afghanistan that were beyond the
reach of cross-border operations, the UN developed two new approaches. One was the initiation of so-called ‘cross-line’ projects where international NGOs working from government controlled areas would provide assistance to areas controlled by the resistance. Although a few such projects were initiated, they were overtaken by events when the Kabul regime collapsed in early 1992. However, the other approach has had more enduring results. In 1989 UNOCA proposed that “. . . Afghan implementing partners have to be identified who can meet the financial and reporting requirements of the United Nations agencies”.157 This meant the involvement of Afghan NGOs, and agencies like UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF and FAO began to use an increasing number of such NGOs as implementing partners.

Until late 1989 there were less than 10 Afghan NGOs, and those that existed were mostly involved in health services and education for refugees. However, with the new UN policy encouraging the formation of Afghan cross-border NGOs, and with new sources of funding opening up, their number grew dramatically over the next couple of years. Of the 43 NGOs which were implementing UN funded cross-border projects towards the end of 1990, only 6 were Afghan. By 1991 the number of Afghan NGOs had increased to 64, by the middle of 1992 to 82, and by the end of 1993 to 148.158 Most of the new Afghan NGOs are quite small in terms of budgets and staff, and nearly all of them are involved in project implementation inside Afghanistan. Their main source of funding has been the UN system, which has provided up to 80 per cent of their funds (Dupree 1994: 20). Other funding has been provided by the European Union and by bilateral donors either directly or through international NGOs in Pakistan.159 To reduce the risk of loss due to fraud or incompetence, the donor agencies have mainly provided their funding as relatively small short-term grants. As a result the Afghan NGOs have been even more exposed to the planning and staffing problems caused by uncertain funding than has been the case with the international NGOs.

158) Information from Thomas (1991) and from the Directory of Humanitarian Agencies working for Afghans (Sept. 1992, p. 5), and Summary of the database on NGO activities (Dec. 1993, p. 57).
159) The most important of these donors are the Canadian International Development Agency, the International Rescue Committee, the Asia Foundation, the Norwegian Refugee Council/Norwegian Church Aid, and Afghanistan Reconstruction Consultants (ARCON) from Saudi Arabia (Summary of the database on NGO activities, ACBAR, December 1993, p. 52).
The projects undertaken by the Afghan NGOs have covered the whole range of activities also undertaken by the international agencies. However, the Afghan NGOs differ from the usual notion of an NGO insofar as they have no voluntary constituency that contributes financially to their activities and to which they are accountable. While some are established only to provide assistance to a specific community, area or ethnic group, and are therefore at least partly answerable to the people they are working for, the bulk of the Afghan NGOs are in reality contractor agencies. As such they cover a wide spectrum from professionally capable agencies to more dubious outfits established either to serve the interests of a particular party or commander, or to divert rehabilitation funds for personal use. Among the most efficient and professional Afghan NGOs are those involved in de-mining, and at the same time they represent UNOCAs most successful achievement. The programme was started in the autumn of 1988. The activities of the NGOs engaged in de-mining comprise surveying and mapping of mined areas, mine awareness training for refugees and people in Afghanistan, and actual de-mining. By 1993 the whole effort comprised eight NGOs of which all but one were fully staffed by Afghans.

Changes during 1994 in the UNDP approach to project funding seemed to reflect the realisation that most Afghan NGOs are in fact contractor agencies. Whereas both Afghan and international NGOs would previously submit proposals which were usually based on their own surveys to the UN for funding, UNDP now identifies and formulates projects based on its own surveys of particular districts. The projects are then either given to selected NGOs of proven performance, or put out to tender for bids from NGOs, private contractors or the communities themselves.

Only time will tell how many Afghan NGOs will survive this transition, which takes place in the context of generally diminishing funding for rehabilitation in Afghanistan. Surprisingly, their number has continued to grow despite the reductions in overall funding. Nor is it clear what role Afghan NGOs will be allowed by a central government once political stability returns to Afghanistan. Although a few private contractors implemented government construction projects, no Afghan NGOs existed before the war. The possibility exists that a future central government may not be prepared to accept that part of the resources, which it could control, are instead channelled through non-government organisations.160
From Solidarity to Rehabilitation and Development

With the Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989 the conditions for project implementation inside Afghanistan greatly improved. As the Kabul regime abandoned many of its less important military posts in the provinces, and as the risks of air attacks diminished, large areas became accessible for assistance. Since vehicles could now be used for transport, the volume of assistance could be increased significantly. Monitoring could also be undertaken on a regular basis, though until 1991 non-UN expatriates were not allowed by the Pakistani authorities to cross the border and still had to do this clandestinely. So, although large areas still remained difficult or impossible to reach, the result was nevertheless a vast expansion in cross-border assistance.

In addition to the new Afghan NGOs, the number of international NGOs involved in cross-border assistance also increased sharply during 1989 and 1990. Of the 58 NGOs that were members of the coordination body ACBAR at the end of 1989, a total of 46 undertook projects in Afghanistan, and of these around 40 were international NGOs from non-Islamic countries.161 A total of 39 NGOs implemented both refugee and cross-border projects, while 7 worked exclusively in Afghanistan. The number of non-Islamic international agencies grew over the next few years to drop again to roughly the same level by mid-1994. This fluctuation in the number of agencies reflects the changes in international funding as shown in the table below:162

160) However, at least at this point in time the Afghan government have indicated a willingness to approve the involvement of authorized NGOs in the implementation of the UN rehabilitation strategy (Action plan for Immediate rehabilitation, UNDP, Kabul 1993, p.18).
161) An unknown, but apparently fairly substantial number of NGOs from the Islamic world also undertook various activities inside Afghanistan, including the provision of humanitarian assistance. Most of these have by now been closed down by the Pakistani authorities.
162) The figures in the table are derived from information in Overview of NGO assistance to the people of Afghanistan, ACBAR (March 1990, p.3); Directory of Humanitarian Agencies working for Afghans by ACBAR from 1992 to 1994; and the ACBAR Annual Report 1993/94 (September 1994, p.37). Since the figures in the ACBAR reports are highly inconsistent if the reports for successive years are compared, the table above only provides an indication of the relative magnitude of funding in different years.
The budgets of the ACBAR member NGOs only represent part of the total assistance to either the refugees or reconstruction in Afghanistan, since some of the UN assistance plus that provided by a number of American and in particular Arab agencies are not included in the figures above. If the total budgets for all agencies whether UN, American or Arab are considered, the figures show the same fluctuation with funding increasing to a peak in 1992 after which it drops sharply again.163 However, what these aggregate figures do not show, are significant changes in the relative importance of different donors, the regional distribution of the assistance, and its composition in terms of different project types.

As mentioned above, since the mid eighties, the USA had been by far the largest donor for cross-border assistance. From 1989 the UN also became an important donor. In addition, funds from the European Union and bilateral aid from European governments constituted a significant portion of the overall assistance as did the funding from the Gulf countries. The important change came in 1992, when US assistance was reduced to around 50 million dollars. In 1993 it dropped further to around 20 million, while that of the Gulf countries fell to a third of the level of the previous year. By mid-1994 American funding through USAID to Afghanistan stopped completely. At the same time UN funding also underwent minor reductions between 1992 and 1994. However, part of the reduction in the assistance from the USA and the Gulf Countries has been balanced by a considerable increase in the funding provided by the European Union and bilateral European assistance, which now constitutes the largest share of the total aid that is provided. Nevertheless, the net result is that the decrease in overall assistance from 1992 to 1994 will continue into 1995, and this will have serious consequences for the volume of assistance that is available for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Table 2: Aggregate budgets of ACBAR members (US $ millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To refugees</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Afghanistan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

163) Total funding for all humanitarian assistance to either refugees or cross-border projects rose from around US$ 73 million in 1988 to a peak of 182 million in 1992, after which it decreased to 122 million in 1994 according to the *Directory of humanitarian agencies working for Afghans* by ACBAR, December 1993 and February 1995.
The regional distribution of assistance has always been a question of accessibility determined by both geographical proximity to Pakistan and the security conditions along the transport routes and in the areas of assistance. By 1989 the border provinces of Kunar and Paktika were entirely under mujaheddin control, as were portions of Nangarhar, Logar, Ghazni, Zabul and Kandahar. This was where the bulk of the assistance went and, while some assistance was provided to provinces in the north-east, the rest of the country received very little. Among the more accessible areas in eastern Afghanistan most of the assistance went to Paktika and in particular to Kunar, which for the next two years remained by far the largest recipient of cross-border assistance. This regional pattern continued until the fall of Khost in eastern Paktia to mujaheddin forces in April 1991, after which this area became the focus for the rehabilitation effort over the next year. With the collapse of the Kabul regime in April 1992, most of the country suddenly appeared accessible, but the fighting in Kabul and political instability in Kandahar soon limited access to large parts of central, northern and south-western Afghanistan. As a result Nangarhar became the main recipient of assistance followed by other provinces in the east like Paktia, Kunar, Ghazni, Paktika, Wardak and Logar. Although 1993 and 1994 witnessed a shift of emphasis in the allocation of assistance to provinces further away from the border in the east-central region and also to the south-western part of the country, Nangarhar still remains the province which receives the largest amount of aid. The central, north-western and western provinces continue to receive little assistance compared with the eastern part of the country.

However, this pattern has recently begun to change somewhat. Some NGOs have tried to overcome this problem by establishing regional project offices in areas that are otherwise difficult to reach, and have vested these offices both with the necessary resources and authority to plan and implement projects in the areas they serve. One example of this is the SCA’s regional office in Taloqan, the provincial capital of the north-eastern province of Takhar. Another example is the city and province of Herat where, in addition to the UN, first Medicin du Monde and then DACAAR began to work in late 1992 and early 1993. Herat also illustrates some of the difficulties involved in providing assistance to what in the aid context remains the more remote corners of Afghanistan. Although Herat province has been a lot safer than any of the eastern provinces and more and more supplies are available in the local market, project implementation is still confronted with supply problems. NGO staff can only travel to and from Pakistan by air since access by road is too unsafe. Local Afghan
merchants do bring in supplies from Iran, but so far it has not been possible to use this country as a supply base for the rehabilitation of Afghanistan to any extent comparable to Pakistan.

Over the years the composition of the assistance provided to Afghanistan has changed. The ‘cash-for-food’ assistance which, as mentioned above, had constituted the largest share of the assistance provided during the war, had largely disappeared by 1989. While emergency relief has continued to be a component in the overall assistance and even increased during 1993 and 1994 due to the new exodus of refugees from Kabul, the main emphasis over the past five years has been on assistance for rehabilitation, reconstruction and development. In 1989 the priority was to assist in the creation of conditions which would facilitate the return and resettlement of the refugees. Central to this effort were measures to assist the revival of the agricultural production to prevent serious food shortages and dependency on external food aid. During 1989 agricultural assistance together with the repair of irrigation systems became the main components of assistance followed by health services, while support for the important sector of education seems to have dropped compared with the previous year.164

During the period from 1989 to 1994 the initial emphasis on the re-establishment of agricultural production and basic infrastructure was replaced by health and education as the largest sectors of assistance.165

Table 3: Composition of assistance in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Irrigation</th>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Mines</th>
<th>Emergency</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

164) These changes in the composition of assistance is based on data on the projects of ACBAR member NGOs in five provinces between 1987 and 1989 presented in Overview of NGO assistance to the people of Afghanistan, Peshawar, March 1990, p. 4.

165) The figures in the table is based on information in the Directory of Humanitarian agencies working for Afghans by ACBAR from September 1992, December 1993 and February 1995. A predilection for computer graphics in the Directories obscures the actual figures, and the percentages in the table are therefore only indicative.
These changes do not necessarily mirror the rehabilitation needs of Afghanistan as such but are the result of a number of factors. It would appear that the proportional decrease in assistance for agriculture and irrigation is partly attributable to the success of these activities in the eastern border provinces, where most of the needs are now covered. At the same time activities on a similar scale have been difficult to start up in more distant areas due to the problems of access.

The high proportion of the total assistance constituted by health services reflects the total collapse of governmental health service and the enormous needs that exist, as well as the fact that people have become used to better health care during their exile in Pakistan and now place this high on their list of priority needs. The same applies to education. Whereas the returnees during the first phases of the resettlement process would give priority to assistance to facilitate the revival of agricultural production, the emphasis has gradually shifted to education as one of the main priorities in the areas where people have successfully resettled. Refugees frequently state that one of the major concerns regarding their return is whether their children will have opportunity to continue the schooling they have started in Pakistan. The drastic decline in the support for education in 1994 is attributable to the termination of US assistance.

Figure 10: Teaching goes on while the school is being rebuilt, Chaprahah in Nangarhar, August 1993
The decline in construction activities is influenced by a different set of factors. Construction comprises different forms of assistance ranging from repair of roads and public buildings such as schools and clinics to support for the reconstruction of homes by returning refugees. As a result, the figures obscure different tendencies. While school repair has clearly been on the increase over the past couple of years, road repair has declined. Agencies have scaled down their involvement in road repair, partly due to decreased funding but also because this activity presents problems of sustainability. Afghanistan’s central governments have always been responsible for road maintenance, and the NGO road repair projects were undertaken with the expectation that a government would emerge within a relatively short period to take care of this. This has not happened, and neither regional authorities nor local communities have had the resources, capability or will to undertake road maintenance themselves.

**Sustainability**

Although the perspective of most rehabilitation assistance has been to provide short-term assistance to enable the initial revival of the economy and basic social services, the problems encountered in connection with road maintenance illustrates that, in addition to this, the sustainability of what has been provided has to be considered as well. Either the aid agencies will have to shoulder the increasing costs for operation and maintenance of many of the facilities and services they have provided or they will have to assist in the development of mechanisms which will enable the Afghans themselves to generate the necessary funds for this. As the struggle for control over Kabul drags on, and the prospects regarding the formation of a central authority becomes more and more uncertain, and as donor contributions at the same time decline, the issue of sustainability gains increasing importance. If a central government is eventually established, this would still remain a crucial issue since this government would in any case have very few means at its disposal for reconstruction and subsequent operation and maintenance. Thus, the issue of sustainability has to be considered both at the community level and at state level.

What complicates the issue further is that, even after the emergency aid into zones of war was replaced by rehabilitation assistance from 1989 onwards, many of the aid agencies have continued to provide facilities
such as schools and clinics without consideration of existing government plans for these sectors. Although the new schools, clinics and even hospitals may very well answer real needs in the areas where they are established, they also saddle a future Afghan government with unforeseen expenses for operation and maintenance. The only way to ensure the sustainability of whatever facilities that have been provided, and to limit the burden that they will impose on a future central government, is therefore to promote mechanisms to generate the funds for operation and maintenance among the local users themselves.

The experience of aid agencies regarding the establishment of organisational conditions facilitating local sustainability has so far been a mixed one. Many NGOs have tried to obtain varying levels of community contribution to their projects both to lower costs and to ensure that the recipients would have a stake in the subsequent maintenance of the facilities that were provided. The experience has been that community contributions have been fairly easy to obtain for projects – like irrigation repair or drinking water supply based on handpumps – to which the beneficiaries themselves attach a high priority. For such projects the operation and maintenance by the users have also been relatively unproblematical. Before the war, maintenance and repairs of irrigation works, except large government operated systems, was organised by an institution known as the mir ab, which in many cases has been revived after people have returned to their villages. In the case of drinking water based on handpumps, the relatively small user groups have also generally been able to work out arrangements for co-funding of the maintenance costs.

However, where no ‘traditional’ institutions existed before or where installations or facilities are relatively large-scale in terms of the user group they serve, sustainability of operation and maintenance becomes a problem. Local shura have difficulties exercising the degree of authority necessary to mobilise the required funds from the people they represent. Moreover, their primary concern is the maintenance of order, and whatever resources they spend in the public domain is primarily related to this effort.

Donors like the UN and the European Union as well as the NGOs are all devoting increasing attention to the issue of sustainability. One expression of this concern is the above-mentioned intention of the UN to develop measures aimed at the ‘consolidation of self-sufficiency’ among the refugees regarding the operation and maintenance of such services as water supply, health and education. It also applies to programmes in Afghanistan itself, where both education and health services are planned to
become increasingly community funded. Within the educational sector the parents of school-going children will be expected to contribute in cash or kind to cover the costs of education thus ".. meeting their own needs and expectations". However, the question remains, how it can be ensured that these needs and expectations measure up to the standards that should be expected from a public educational system, which in many communities is engulfed in a struggle between the maktab or regular government school and the madrasa or religious school.

One of the means considered by many agencies to achieve self-sufficiency and sustainability, even regarding such services as health, is the market. In the present situation where a very large proportion of the population of Afghanistan is extremely poor, be they returnees or those who have stayed on throughout the war, access to services through the market is clearly problematical. If market mechanisms are used as the principal means to generate the funds required for the sustainability of services such as health and education, it is likely to have severe social and economic consequences for the less well-off and to deepen social inequality.

To consolidate the achievements that have been made regarding agriculture, health, and education and to extend them to the rest of the country, a virtual reestablishment of the institutional infrastructure comprising administrative systems and educational facilities at state level is required. However, the attainment of sustainability at this level will in all probability require a much longer time perspective than is the case at the community level. Even if an administrative and educational infrastructure is established that is institutionally viable, it is unlikely that the state of which it is part will be able to sustain it financially for a very long time to come.

---

167) Although no final approach has as yet been decided upon, the matter has been discussed among NGOs in the Health Sub-Committe of ACBAR. The NGOs involved in veterinary services have decided to charge the full costs of these from beneficiaries (*ACBAR Annual Report 1993/94*, September 1994, p.7-8).
Attempts at Coordination

Coordination between different agencies providing cross-border assistance within the same sector or the same geographical area has been attempted since the early eighties. During the period of Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the NGOs involved in cross-border assistance were in general quite reluctant for security reasons to share information on their activities with others, and this restricted the scope for coordination. However, some coordination did take place within the ‘Coordination of Medical Committees’ and later in the ‘Cooperation Committee on Agriculture’.

After the signing of the Geneva Accords in early 1988, when an increasing number of NGOs started to prepare for cross-border projects in Afghanistan, the need for a coordinating body increased. As a result ACBAR - the ‘Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief’ - was founded in August 1988 by around 40 NGOs involved in either refugee programs or cross-border projects. Shortly afterwards SWABAC - the ‘South-West Afghanistan Bureau for Agency Coordination’ - was formed as a parallel coordination for the around 13 NGOs operating out of Quetta. By the end of 1993 the membership of ACBAR had increased to 66 agencies and that of SWABAC to 33. In addition two other coordinating bodies have been formed. The ‘Afghan NGO Coordination Bureau’ (ANCB) was established to represent the interests of the increasing number of Afghan NGOs, and the ‘Islamic Coordination Council’ (ICC) to provide a forum for the NGOs from Islamic countries. The membership of these coordination bodies were 52 and 11 respectively by the end of 1993. While the formation of ACBAR and SWABAC represents a division of labour based on regional focus, the establishment of the ANCB and especially of the ICC reflect more basic differences of identity in relation to what they see as Western-dominated organisations. Nevertheless, despite these differences and the tension and distrust which have surfaced from time to time, the fact that ANCB and ACBAR share 17 members has facilitated their relations, and as a member of both ICC and ACBAR the Islamic Relief Agency from Sudan has done much to ease their relations over the years.

The objective of ACBAR has been twofold; to act as a joint representative vis-a-vis the UN system, the donor community and the Pakistani and later Afghan authorities, and to coordinate NGO activities “.. to prevent wasteful duplication and avoid mistakes in project planning”.169

achieve the last objective, committees were established to facilitate the coordination both among NGOs working within the same regions and within the same sectors. While ACBAR has fulfilled its role as a joint representative in relation to the UN and others, and has also had some success in some of its sectoral coordination bodies such as that on agriculture, the achievements regarding regional coordination have been limited.

The limited results of regional coordination are all the more regrettable as since the rehabilitation effort started in 1989, the bulk of the NGOs have been working within a succession of fairly restricted geographical areas - Kunar, eastern Paktia, and Nangarhar. While the coordination groups established for these and other areas have served as useful forums for the exchange of information between aid agencies, they have never been able to achieve what should have been the primary objective of coordination: namely to work out general plans and agree on which agency does what and where, and to ensure a balanced distribution of the available assistance in relation to needs within the areas in question. Moreover, apart from certain narrow common policies like local salary levels and more recently of user payment for certain services, the extent to which the NGOs have managed to reach a broader consensus on policy and approach has also been rather limited.

The responsibility for this should not be placed at the door of ACBAR or any of the other coordinating bodies but belongs squarely with the NGOs. Very few if any of these have been willing or able to make the necessary concessions with regard to their own operational autonomy to further coordination. Even monitoring of project implementation by ACBAR has been consistently opposed by a majority of its member agencies. The reasons for this are several but not the least important is probably the lack of flexibility imposed by donors with regard to the plans they have approved for funding, as well as the nature of the funding itself.

Because ACBAR does not possess any authority on its own, the commitment of its members is insufficient and the Afghan authorities are either too fragmented or too weak administratively to ensure coordination, this coordination can only come about if it is imposed by the donors. As those who control the funding, they alone wield the sanctions necessary to achieve coordination among the NGOs. When in the summer of 1991 it became clear that the Khost region in eastern Paktia would soon replace Kunar as the main area for NGO assistance, an attempt was made to get the UN agencies to support the coordination effort. Although key UN agencies like UNDP, FAO and UNICEF did participate together with some other donors, the exercise cannot be regarded as a success. One of
the reasons was that USAID made its participation conditional; it would only adhere to the coordination framework insofar as it corresponded with its own policies and priorities. At the same time it seemed that the UN gave the formation of new Afghan NGOs higher priority than coordination, since at least in some cases they were neither required to adjust their plans with those of other NGOs, nor was their performance closely monitored. In addition, funding for the Afghan NGOs was sometimes delayed or did not materialise at all, and the result was increasing frustration among the potential target groups, who began to put pressure on other NGOs to provide the assistance they had been made to expect.

By the summer of 1992 when Nangarhar had replaced Khost as the primary recipient of NGO assistance, new efforts were made to coordinate the more than 100 NGOs that are reported to be working in the province. As in Khost, the Nangarhar authorities have also been involved in the coordination process, but apart from facilitating the exchange of information, this attempt has not been any more successful than the previous ones. However, while it has not been possible to coordinate the rehabilitation projects, this seems to have been accomplished with regard to the emergency assistance to the new refugees from Kabul.

Lately the Peshawar office of the European Union has begun to exert pressure on the NGOs it is funding to establish proper coordination, especially within the priority areas of health and education. Both the UN agencies and ACBAR will be involved in this effort. The closure of the USAID Afghanistan program and the simultaneous emergence of the European Union as the principal donor may thus finally create the necessary basis for coordination of the rehabilitation effort in Afghanistan. That this has to be imposed from the outside provides a telling indication of the limitations of NGO assistance despite the unquestionable achievements they have otherwise made regarding Afghanistan’s rehabilitation over the past six years.

**Commanders and Shura**

Throughout the Soviet occupation the implementation of cross-border projects remained difficult. Despite the unspoken acceptance of cross-border assistance by the Pakistani authorities, they did not permit access through the tribal areas of Pakistan and across the border, which therefore had to be done clandestinely. In Afghanistan supplies usually had to be carried on pack animals since the roads were either controlled
by government forces or mined. All of this made both project preparation and subsequent monitoring by expatriates extremely difficult, and for much of the time most agencies had to rely on indirect and inadequate information regarding the fate of their projects.

What compounded these problems was that, to get access to Afghanistan at all, it was necessary to work either with one or other of the resistance parties, or with individual mujaheddin commanders. While unavoidable if assistance were to be provided at all, the reliance on parties or commanders was problematical for several reasons. Throughout the eighties expatriate NGO staff would often use the phrase ‘our commander’ when talking about their cross-border projects. The reverse, however, was equally the case, since the NGO might be totally dependent on ‘their’ commander for the future of their projects, and since he might be benefitting both materially and politically from this dependency. First of all, this dependence restricted the assistance to the areas under the control of the party or commander in question, and these were not always those most in need. Secondly, it meant that, even within a fairly limited geographical area, it would primarily and often exclusively be the followers of the party or the commander chosen as partner who received the assistance. The implications of this were not just that the distribution of assistance was biased, but also that the party or commander acting as middleman for the aid agency was able to strengthen his influence in relation to political rivals. The result was that certain NGOs rightly or wrongly became identified with particular parties or even commanders, which reduced their credibility among the Afghans, such an image became very difficult to shed later on. Finally, the reliance on parties or commanders in combination with the practical difficulties of providing clandestine aid to areas at war provided ample opportunities for corruption and diversion of resources.

It should be stressed, though, that despite the difficult context in which cross-border assistance was provided, many of the NGOs did over time manage to find capable and trustworthy partners and also developed networks which could provide reasonably reliable monitoring information. Moreover, until 1985, when the USA began its non-military assistance to resistance controlled areas, the solidarity NGOs plus a few other agencies like MSF were the only ones trying to provide the people in these areas with humanitarian assistance.

When the rehabilitation assistance began in earnest in 1989, in order to reduce their dependency on single individuals and achieve a better distribution of the assistance both the UN and many of the NGOs preferred to deal with local shura (council) representing the people of the area they
were assisting rather than with individual commanders. At that time, the most prominent of these councils was the *Shura-e Nizar* established by Ahmad Shah Masoud as the political and administrative framework for part of the north-eastern provinces. However, as the aid agencies were soon to find out, *shura* elsewhere were not quite similar to this partly imagined ideal-type, nor were they necessarily easier to deal with than commanders.

First of all, *shura* do not exist everywhere. While the insistence of the aid agencies to deal only with a *shura* may in some cases lead to the formation of reasonably representative councils, in other cases it has not. Instead the dominant commander, who if nothing else is an astute politician, have been known to call in some of his political followers and present these to the aid agency as the *shura* to ensure that the area under his control would not miss the opportunity of assistance.

Secondly, *shura* are not normally organisational entities geared towards the task of day to day administration, and attempts to invest them with such functions have most often failed. The traditional councils of the Afghan countryside (called *jirga* in Pashto and *majlis* in Persian) are formed on an ad hoc basis to deal with specific issues of common concern ranging from conflict resolution to dealing with outsiders. Depending on the social and economic characteristics of the area in question, and on the case they are dealing with, such councils may comprise anything from a handful of prominent leaders to most of the adult men of the area. The councils encountered by the aid agencies are often such ‘traditional’ *qau-mi shura*, which represent specific local groups and which have been constituted to petition the aid agencies for assistance. Nor are the *jehadi shura* established by commanders for the resistance struggle and the division of spoils necessarily more suited to undertake administrative functions, although some now do this with varying success.

Thirdly, the councils may not be fully representative of the political groupings in a certain area, and even where this is the case, they are everywhere subject to an inherent fragility caused by the potential or actual rivalry among the leaders who constitute them. This applies equally to the *shura* representing a single village and to those representing large tribal groups or even whole provinces. Thus, the enmity between kinship groups, factions, parties or even commanders from the same party may prevent them from agreeing to sit together in a joint forum to discuss matters such as aid projects. Where *shura* are formed, they are based on shared but situational interests and concerns. As such their unity only lasts as long as the different participants feel that their interests are being accommodated.
Over time most of the aid agencies have learned to cope with this fragmented, fluid and volatile political environment to the extent that they can successfully implement projects. Even so, some of the constraints, that the political conditions create for the provision of assistance have not changed since the shift from the provision of emergency aid during the Soviet occupation to the present assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Thus the dependency inherent in working through individual commanders has not been entirely overcome where *shura* function as the counterparts of the aid agencies. The members of particular localities, communities or kinship groups usually show little if any consideration for the wider needs for rehabilitation outside their own area. A particular *shura* will therefore attempt to restrict the coverage of the assistance to the area it represents, and within a *shura* the more powerful members may try to influence the allocation of assistance to benefit their own followers at the expense of others. Moreover, aid agencies have repeatedly experienced that, when they considered their projects completed in a particular area, the *shura* representatives would insist that they continue and try to prevent them moving to a new project area. One of the frequent methods used to achieve this has been to stop an NGO from moving its equipment out of the area controlled by the *shura* in question. At times the aid agency has eventually managed to shift its equipment, in other cases it was appropriated by those that had been assisted. This state of affairs obviously places certain restrictions on the scale of the projects that are feasible to undertake as long as the present political fragmentation and instability continues. It also raises the question as to what extent aid agencies can transfer their project administration and equipment to Afghanistan and still retain their operational autonomy. During the last couple of years a number of agencies including SCA and DACAAR have established regional offices inside Afghanistan. So far this has worked well, but it remains to be seen whether they will have the freedom to shift these offices to other locations if and when they consider their tasks completed where they are operating at present.

However, the instability and uncertainty surrounding project implementation in Afghanistan is to a certain extent aggravated by the aid agencies themselves. Some of the persistent security problems which they face are directly attributable to the manner in which the assistance is being provided. By working with *shura* instead of individual commanders, the political implications of providing assistance have not been overcome. In both situations the assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction is a political
resource in the context of local political rivalry. The leader or representative who individually or as the member of a \textit{shura} manages to establish himself as the middleman – who is seen by the community as the one who facilitates the provision of assistance – will increase his influence at the expense of his political rivals. This inevitably creates resentment among those who feel bypassed, be they individuals or communities. Their reaction has often been either to put pressure on the aid agencies to assist them as well or to obstruct the provision of assistance in order to deny it to their neighbours or rivals. This, as much as simple banditry, forms the background of a large proportion of the security incidents where aid agencies have had their vehicles or supplies hijacked. Thus the inability of the aid agencies to establish proper coordination of their assistance in specific regions is not just a question of ethics nor of a more efficient use of available resources; it has direct political implications on the security environment in which the assistance is being provided.

\section*{Prospects for Assistance}

Unavoidably, international assistance for relief and reconstruction has become a political resource for competing political groups and interests at the local, regional and central level. The absence of a central government will inevitably limit the scale of the assistance that can be provided to support Afghanistan’s reconstruction. The lack of security will also restrict the type of projects that can be undertaken in many areas. As before, the more stable areas will attract more assistance. Apart from facilitating the economic and social recovery of these areas, plus the return of their refugees, the assistance will also serve to underwrite the power of the authorities that exist in the area in question. This in turn will contribute to the consolidation of the existing political fragmentation and may eventually make a reunification more difficult to achieve. If some of the larger regional political entities achieve a stability such that they can attract large scale projects, this tendency may become even more pronounced. While there can be no question that assistance to assist reconstruction and the return of refugees is urgently needed, if Afghanistan is not to remain one of the poorest countries in the world it seems equally indisputable that, as long as a political settlement is not reached, those assisting its people will have to face this dilemma.

Should a political settlement be reached and a central government emerge, assistance for reconstruction will constitute an important element
in its attempt to extend its authority over the country. Yet, whether united under a central government or fragmented as is the case now, Afghanistan will remain dependent on external assistance for its reconstruction and development for years to come. Afghanistan has never been able to generate the domestic revenue required both to maintain internal order and to undertake development. The achievement of this, if it is ever to happen, will be a gradual process where economic recovery and extension of state authority are closely connected. This naturally limits the level of sustainability that can be expected for certain kinds of programs like health and education in the short and even medium term. While international aid agencies should support increasing local involvement and contributions regarding such programs, it has to be realised that as a result of enduring financial weakness any central authority in Afghanistan will require continuing external support to maintain its own institutional infrastructure.

While the achievements of both the UN and the NGOs over the past years have demonstrated that it is possible to provide assistance in Afghanistan despite the ongoing conflict, the funding by international donors has at the same time been declining. This is all the more regrettable, since the aid agencies finally seem to be moving towards better coordination and overall planning. The ‘Afghanistan Rehabilitation Strategy’ from October 1993, which as prepared by the UNDP together with other UN agencies, Afghan government officials and NGOs, is an example of this improved collaboration. So far, it has received very little support from international donors. Nor has the latest annual appeal by the UN for US$ 106 million fared much better. By February 1995 only about 14 per cent of the funds had been committed.170

---

Summary and Conclusions

Afghanistan has often been described as a ‘crossroad of cultures’ and as ‘a highway of conquest’. This does not only apply to its distant past, but has also been characteristic of its recent history. During this century Afghanistan has been subject to external cultural influences, which made the country an arena for a struggle between different ideologies. The Islamic modernism and nationalism advocated by part of the country’s political elite from the beginning of this century played a central role in the process of development. This in turn later created conditions where the mutually opposed ideologies of communism and radical Islam could achieve a following in opposition to the existing social and political order. Before the coup d’état in April 1978 and the war that followed, both the communist and radical Islamist movements were numerically quite small and their supporters came predominantly from the urban educated population. Yet both of them had international linkages which they could draw on, and which in turn influenced them, with the result that in the wake of the April coup Afghanistan became a battleground between opposed but essentially alien conceptions of how Afghan society should be organised.

During its course this war moved through several phases. It began in the summer of 1978 as a rapidly expanding popular revolt against the communist regime, which had taken power through the coup d’état a few months earlier. From the Soviet military intervention in December 1979 until when the last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan in February 1989, it became a national liberation struggle. Just as the Communist regime was supported by the Soviet Union, the resistance, which from the early eighties had become dominated by a mixture of traditionalist and Islamist parties, also received external assistance from Pakistan, Iran other Islamic countries, and in particular from the USA. After the Soviet withdrawal the struggle continued as a civil war between a communist regime entrenched in the major towns and a resistance in control of most of the countryside. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the termination of the
massive assistance it had provided, the communist regime in Afghanistan also fell. In April 1992 the resistance entered Kabul and this became the start of a ruthless and bloody power struggle between changing coalitions of resistance parties allied with elements of the former regime – a struggle which still involves external support for the different combatants and which continues with no end in sight.

The war has caused the Afghan people incredible suffering, and has wrought vast destruction both in material and social terms. At least one million people have been killed, and hundreds of thousands are disabled or have become orphans and widows. At the height of the war, close to half of the country’s population were refugees either in exile outside the country or internally displaced. Although Afghanistan was considered to be one of the poorest countries of the world even before the war, its development had nevertheless progressed substantially during the preceding decades. Virtually all of these achievements have been obliterated. Instead of the self-sufficiency in food production achieved during the seventies, the country now faces a substantial food deficit. The physical infrastructure such as irrigation systems, roads, power generation and what little industry the country possessed have either been destroyed or seriously damaged due to war or lack of maintenance. Social services like education and health have almost completely collapsed, as have many of the administrative functions of the state apparatus.

Reconstruction and International Assistance

If Afghanistan is ever to recover from the past sixteen years of war, substantial assistance is required from the international community. Although large amounts of assistance have been provided over the years both for the Afghan refugees and for the rehabilitation of the country, donors have become increasingly reluctant to allocate funds for Afghanistan. On the one hand the attention and funds of the international community have been drawn away from Afghanistan by emergencies elsewhere in the world like Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda. On the other hand the ongoing civil war, the dim prospects of a political compromise and the continuing presence of large numbers of refugees have produced growing disillusionment regarding aid to Afghanistan. A major donor like USA completely terminated its bilateral assistance for Afghan reconstruction in mid-1994, most NGOs have seen their funding reduced over the last couple of years and the comprehensive UN ‘Action Plan for
Immediate Rehabilitation’ from late 1993 has been met very little positive response from international donors.

Yet the lack of consistent commitment to Afghan reconstruction by the international community appears both callous from a humanitarian perspective and politically shortsighted in terms of its likely implications. It is also unfounded in view of the results that have actually been achieved with regard to both repatriation and rehabilitation.

Both the UN and the NGOs have by now acquired a substantial capacity and experience regarding implementation of rehabilitation and reconstruction programs in Afghanistan. Although small compared with the overwhelming needs, this assistance has nevertheless produced substantial achievements both with regard to de-mining and in sectors like agriculture, minor infrastructure, primary education and health services. Most of this assistance has up till now been provided to the Eastern and Southern provinces along the border with Pakistan, from which a very large proportion of the refugees originated and which also suffered very extensive destruction. However, over the past couple of years the regions beyond the Hindu Kush and those in the west have also begun to receive fairly substantial amounts of assistance. Even so, access still remains difficult to large parts of the country which therefore receive little or no assistance.

In the devastated and politically fragmented Afghan society, aid for reconstruction (as well as relief) has become a contested political resource. The political leaders who can obtain such assistance improve their prospects of attracting followers and strengthening their position vis-a-vis their rivals. This has two important implications. On the one hand it contributes to the prevailing insecurity, since local leaders may apply force or the threat of force against aid agencies to ensure that assistance is being provided to their own area. On the other hand, aid agencies for the same reason tend to select the more secure and politically stable areas for their assistance. Thus, the more secure areas with relatively stable authorities attract the bulk of the assistance, and this in turn contributes towards consolidating this authority. The unintended outcome of this is likely to be twofold, namely uneven levels of regional rehabilitation and an increasing capability of some regions to maintain political independence in relation to any future central government.

Apart from the limitations imposed by decreasing funding and the difficulties of access, a persistent shortcoming affecting the provision of rehabilitation assistance has been the inability of the aid agencies to establish proper coordination. Such coordination has been lacking concerning
both the approaches used for the implementation of programs within different sectors and the distribution of assistance in relation to needs within specific regions.

Despite established organisational frameworks for coordination such as ACBAR, coordination has remained elusive until recently. The lessons to be drawn from more than five years of experience of rehabilitation assistance are twofold. Firstly, that proper coordination can only come about if it is imposed by someone who wields adequate sanctions. In the present state of political fragmentation, neither local power holders nor the central government in Kabul possess sufficient administrative capacity and authority to establish such coordination. Only the donor agencies can enforce coordination, and this will only happen if the donors do not have divergent political agendas for their assistance. Recently, the prospects for better coordination have improved. This is caused by an apparent decrease in the previous inter-agency rivalry within the UN, by the termination of USAID assistance which has removed from the scene a major donor with little interest in coordination, and by the simultaneous emergence of the European Union as a leading donor with an expressed commitment to coordination. The second lesson is that improved coordination is not just a question of aid ethics nor of a more efficient utilisation of resources. In the present political context, rehabilitation assistance represents scarce assets for impoverished communities, tribal groups or political factions who view each other as actual or potential rivals. Time and again aid agencies have experienced that those who felt bypassed were both willing and able to deny assistance to their neighbours by hijacking agency supplies, vehicles and even staff. A more equal distribution of the available assistance according to standardised methodologies will therefore contribute directly to improve the political stability and security in the areas where the aid agencies operate.

Since rehabilitation to a large extent overlaps with rural development, sustainability of activities and institutions has become a key issue. However, the current considerations of sustainability tend to overlook two problems. Firstly, that while sustainability may be feasible for certain activities that can be handled locally, it is unrealistic for the supporting institutional frameworks at the level of government. A future central government or for that matter any of the present regional authorities will have even less likelihood than any previous Afghan governments of generating the required resources domestically. Secondly, that the reliance on market mechanisms to generate local sustainability, as advocated by both
the UN and NGOs, is likely to create further inequality and marginalisation within the destitute majority of the Afghan population.

**Repatriation**

Despite its limitations both in terms of scale and delivery, the rehabilitation assistance has facilitated the return of refugees and the recovery of the rural economy. Of the estimated 3.2 million refugees in Pakistan and the 2.3 million in Iran in 1989 around 2.8 million had returned to Afghanistan by the end of 1994. The bulk of the refugees come from the rural areas in the border provinces, and most have returned to their home villages. The pattern of refugee return clearly shows that while rehabilitation may indeed ease the resettlement process, no amount of assistance will lure the refugees back if they perceive the security conditions in their home area as unfavourable.

Thus, until the collapse of the Kabul regime in April 1992, most of the refugee return was to those areas under resistance control which were considered reasonably stable. Areas like the Kunar province, which had received large-scale assistance but which was at that time plagued by persistent mujaheddin rivalry, saw only limited repatriation. Following the mujaheddin takeover of Kabul, a massive voluntary repatriation comprising around 1.4 million people took place during the remainder of 1992. The continuing power struggle in Kabul has slowed down but not halted the process of repatriation. Thus, in 1993 the figure dropped to 860,000 returnees, and during 1994 only 329,000 refugees returned. Despite protests from UNHCR, Iran has forcibly pushed Afghan refugees back into Western Afghanistan both in 1993 and 1994, and will do so again in 1995.

The decreasing refugee return has been paralleled by an exodus of refugees fleeing the fighting and lawlessness in Kabul. The number of these refugees is unknown, but runs into several hundred thousands. While some have sought sanctuary in rural communities from where they had fled to Kabul during earlier phases of the war, others have fled North to the former Soviet Central Asian republics or are settled in refugee camps in Northern Afghanistan. However, most fled East in the hope of reaching safety in Pakistan. Around 260,000 refugees are settled in four camps outside Jalalabad in the Nangarhar province and another 250,000 in the city itself. Although Pakistan closed the border to further refugees at the end of August 1993, an estimated 76,000 to 100,000 so-called ‘new
arrivals’ have crossed the border and are settled in some of the existing refugee camps in the NWFP.

These new refugees from Kabul are entirely dependent on the assistance provided by international aid agencies. So are another 50,000 displaced people in Kabul, and in addition around 250,000 displaced are living with other families for whom food shortages are becoming an increasing problem. Thus an entirely new emergency situation has developed which requires substantial international relief in addition to that needed to support the rehabilitation of the country and the resettlement of returnees from the ‘old’ refugee population.

The decrease in refugee return over the past two years and the reductions in international funding have made the UNHCR consider what it calls ‘local settlement’ in Pakistan as an alternative to repatriation. Apart from certain vulnerable groups, the rations and other support services for the refugees will be scaled down during 1995. Parallel to this, measures are considered to consolidate the self-sufficiency of the refugees to facilitate their permanent settlement and integration in Pakistan. This strategy is opposed by Pakistan, which does not want to be saddled with the political and economic problems deriving from the permanent settlement of a large well-armed refugee population. Apart from Pakistan’s opposition, the UNHCR strategy is also problematical for other reasons. Its basic premise, namely that the Afghan refugees are by now well integrated in the local Pakistani economy, has not been sufficiently documented. While a sizable number of refugees possibly amounting to several hundred thousands may remain, the rest of the refugees are mainly likely to return. All previous experience shows that the bulk of the refugees, who hail from the rural areas of Afghanistan, will probably go back because a return offers better prospects than permanent settlement in Pakistan.

**Three Scenarios**

Security remains the overriding factor conditioning both refugee return and the extent to which assistance for the reconstruction of Afghanistan can be provided. The three possible scenarios which exist regarding future political developments in Afghanistan will affect overall security in different ways, and will consequently create different contexts for both refugee return and international assistance for the country’s recovery. The first of these scenarios is simply a continuation of the present situation, where fighting rages for the control of Kabul, while the rest of
the country is fragmented into different political entities, which vary with regard to the territory they control and the stability they have achieved within this territory. Until the emergence of the Taliban most of these regional entities had stayed aloof from the power struggle in the capital, and the second scenario entails a situation where this conflict spreads to involve a growing number of these regional polities resulting in a further drastic reduction of security in large areas of the country. The third scenario is one where a political compromise is achieved through the mediation by the UN, another external agent or the Afghans themselves, leading to the formation of a broad-based government and increasingly more peaceful conditions in most of Afghanistan.

Recent developments in Afghanistan have introduced an entirely new factor in the Afghan equation: the Taliban. In the summer of 1994 a new political movement emerged among the clergy in the Kandahar province in opposition to the misrule of rival mujaheddin commanders. It was soon joined by thousands of Afghan students (taliban) from different madrasa in Pakistan and was greeted with enthusiasm by ordinary people. In November the Taliban seized the city of Kandahar and have since then extended their control over ten provinces in the eastern and southern part of the country. At least initially, they appear to have be supported by Pakistan, which has been getting increasingly impatient with a conflict that prevents it from establishing links with the new republics in Central Asia and wants the refugees to go home. At this stage, this new development seems more likely to either consolidate the present political fragmentation or to propel Afghanistan towards a general state of war than to generate the conditions for a political compromise.

**Continued Political Fragmentation**

Even on the background of these recent events, the most likely scenario remains a continuation of the present situation. Afghanistan is today split into different political entities ranging from fairly stable emergent ‘states’ exercising varying degrees of authority over large areas to forms of political organisation based on tribal or factional relations comprising only a village or a valley. In the non-Pashtun areas of the North and West, three large regional political entities have emerged, each dominated by a single ruler. The rise of the Taliban has resulted in the political unification of most of the Pashtun heartland, with the exception of the area under the Jalalabad shura. Although the political aspirations of the Taliban are
national rather than regional or ethnic, their advance has contributed to push Afghanistan closer to a political confrontation along ethnic lines. This may form the basis for a permanent fragmentation of the country.

Each of the five major regional political entities that have emerged have managed to establish a certain administrative control and to generate some revenue mainly through the taxation of commerce. All control substantial armed forces. While nearly all their revenue is utilized for military and security purposes, with very little if any left for civilian functions, the result has nevertheless been increasing internal stability. However, where some of these political entities have clashed along their periphery in the attempt to enlarge their domains, instability and lack of security prevail.

A significant factor which appears to contribute to the increasing relative stability in the rural areas has been a gradual shift in the balance of power from mujaheddin commanders back to ‘traditional’ local leaders like the khan and masher. After the Communist coup in 1978 many of the ‘traditional’ leaders were either killed or exiled, and the depopulation and decline of agriculture meant that control over land lost its former significance as the basis of power in the rural areas. Instead the resistance commander emerged as a new type of leader, and many of these came from social groups who did not previously exercise much influence on local politics. Their influence was not based on control over land but on their ability to assume the role as middleman between their mujaheddin and those who supplied the arms and other resources for the war. With the drying up of these sources and the simultaneous refugee return and agricultural recovery, the influence of many commanders has been eroded while that of the ‘traditional’ local political elite has been reestablished. Although some former mujaheddin commanders have managed to maintain their position, others have resorted to banditry or simply faded away as leaders, and the overall result appears to be an increase in political stability in many areas. The rapid advance of the Taliban may to some extent have been fuelled by this development and at the same time contribute to consolidate it, since the Taliban have further marginalised many commanders.

If the present fragmented situation remains stable, more refugees are likely to return. At the same time, assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction can continue and can probably even be increased beyond its current level. The result will be a pattern of uneven development as the more stable and accessible regions attract most of the assistance, which in turn contributes to consolidate their stability.
The War Spreads

The advance of the *Taliban* since the autumn of 1994 has contributed to stable and peaceful conditions within the extensive areas they now control. However, apart from their attack on Kabul, their attempt to expand into the hitherto peaceful areas ruled by Ismail Khan in Western Afghanistan has involved groups that had until then stayed aloof from the fighting. Most of the smaller Pashtun polities now incorporated in the realm of the *Taliban* had also previously managed to stay out of the struggle for control over Kabul. At the same time, all the protagonists in the power struggle, including the now weakened leaders of the former resistance parties, have been involved in intensive attempts to forge new alliances. So far the *Taliban* have rejected overtures from the former resistance leaders, including those from the now marginalised Hekmatyar, but their defeat at the gates of Kabul and the stalemate in the West may make such alliances more attractive. While it is premature to forecast what the outcome of these political manoeuvres will be, it is likely that they will result in further fighting which could spread to most of the country.

If this happens, the result will probably be that the present limited voluntary repatriation ends completely and that instead new waves of refugees will flee the areas where conflict erupts. The deteriorating security conditions will at best reduce the scale of rehabilitation assistance drastically or at worst bring it to a complete stop. Instead the aid agencies will be faced with a crisis requiring emergency relief both to the population in the zones of war and to the new refugees, who are not likely to be allowed to cross the borders to the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan.

Political Compromise

With the refusal of the *Taliban* to join the transitional council proposed by the UN, their attacks on Kabul and on the domain of Ismail Khan, the third scenario – a peaceful settlement – has become even more unlikely. However, should the establishment of a political compromise and the formation of a government acceptable to much of the Afghan population become a reality, the conditions affecting the provision of assistance in Afghanistan will not change overnight. Afghanistan will have to go through what almost resembles a new process of state formation. The
authority of the central government will have to be reestablished in relation to political entities and ethnic groups who possess the military means to oppose it if their interests are not accommodated. In addition, the state apparatus itself will largely have to be rebuilt and staffed with trained personnel. At present, the lack of trained administrators, together with the inexperience of many of the officials in decision-making positions who have emerged out of the resistance struggle, seriously limits the capacity of both the government in Kabul and regional authorities to efficiently utilise the assistance available.

However, for a political compromise to be reached two conditions are necessary. Firstly, that external powers like Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan and others will discontinue their support for their respective clients in Afghanistan and instead support a negotiated settlement and genuine peace. So far they have not shown any real inclination to do so, nor has the international community put much pressure on them regarding this. Secondly, the Pashtuns will have to abandon their aspirations to regain their role as the politically dominant ethnic group and finally recognise the aspirations and the actual power of other ethnic groups like the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara and accommodate these in the future political setup of Afghanistan.

Continued Dependency

Even if these conditions should be created, Afghanistan will for any foreseeable future continue to be dependent on external assistance. Throughout its modern history no government has been able to generate the revenue necessary both to maintain internal order and to undertake development programs. The development that was achieved from the mid-fifties onwards was almost entirely funded by external donors. Since the late twenties most government revenue has come from the taxation of commerce whereas agriculture, which contributes by far the largest share of the national income, has hardly been taxed at all. It is entirely unlikely that any central government for years to come will be strong enough to impose such agricultural taxes as this would alienate the majority of the population.

In the context of both the first and the third scenario, the international assistance to Afghanistan will invariably affect the relationships between local, regional and central authorities. If a central government is formed, the assistance for reconstruction would constitute a critical asset in its at-
tempts to extend its authority. In the absence of a central government, international aid agencies and their donors are faced with the dilemma that the assistance they have to provide, if Afghanistan is ever to recover, is at the same time likely to contribute to a consolidation of the existing political fragmentation.

Yet, if Afghanistan is abandoned by the international community, its population can only turn to increasing reliance on drug production to feed themselves, and those who want to utilize the country as a base and training ground for Islamic militancy will also gain more leverage. If this is to be avoided, a broad international effort is required both to support Afghanistan’s recovery and to counter the political dependency and continued fragmentation that will result if external assistance is only provided by those who have a narrow ideological or political stake in the country.
Sources


Christensen, A, 1991. ‘Changes and continuities in leadership in rural Afghanistan’. (Paper presented at the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee seminar 'From aid during times of war to aid for reconstruction and development', Islamabad, December).


Reports (without named authors)

Amnesty International:


Afghanistan: Political crisis and the refugees. London, September 1993 (AI Index ASA 11/01/93)


Afghanistan: 12,000 people killed since April 1992 while the international community has kept quiet. AI Index, 28. October 1994 (ASA 11/WU 06/94).

Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR):


Overview of NGO assistance to the people of Afghanistan. ACBAR, Peshawar, March 1990.


Summary of the database of NGO activities. ACBAR, Peshawar, December 1993.


United Nations:


Voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan. UNHCR, Islamabad, August 1994.


Update on the 1995 repatriation and reintegration programme for Afghanistan. UNHCR, February 1995.
Miscellaneous:


Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
Recent NIAS Reports

29. Alain Lefebvre: *Islam, Human Rights and Child Labour in Pakistan*
30. Mytte Fentz: *Natural Resources and Cosmology in Changing Kalasha Society*
31. Børge Bakken (ed.): *Migration in China*
32. Donald B. Wagner: *The Traditional Chinese Iron Industry and Its Modern Fate*
33. Elisabeth Özdalga: *The Veiling Issue, Official Secularism and Popular Islam in Modern Turkey*
34. Sven Cederroth: *Basket Case or Poverty Alleviation? Bangladesh Approaches the Twenty-First Century*
35. Sven Cederroth and Harald O. Skar: *Development Aid to Nepal*
36. David D. Wang: *Clouds over Tianshan. Essays on Social Disturbance in Xinjiang in the 1940s*
37. Erik Paul: *Australia in Southeast Asia. Regionalisation and Democracy*
38. Dang Phong and Melanie Beresford: *Authority Relations and Economic Decision-Making in Vietnam*
39. Mason C. Hoadley (ed.): *Southeast Asian-Centred Economies or Economics?*
40. Cecilia Nathansen Milwertz: *Beijing Women Organizing for Change*
41. Santosh Soren: *Santalia. Catalogue of Santali Manuscripts in Oslo*
42. Robert Thórlind: *Development, Decentralization and Democracy*
43. Tarab Tulku: *A Brief History of Tibetan Academic Degrees in Buddhist Philosophy*
44. Donald B. Wagner: *The State and the Iron Industry in Han China*
45. Timo Kivimäki (ed.): *War or Peace in the South China Sea?*

A full list of NIAS publications is available on request or may be viewed online (see copyright page for contact details).
The Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) is funded by the governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden via the Nordic Council of Ministers, and works to encourage and support Asian studies in the Nordic countries. In so doing, NIAS has been publishing books since 1969, with more than one hundred titles produced in the last ten years.

Nordic Council of Ministers