DIVISIVE FACTORS AND AFGHANISTAN'S QUEST FOR NATIONAL UNITY

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DIVISIVE FACTORS AND AFGHANISTAN'S QUEST FOR NATIONAL UNITY

Introduction

Afghanistan shares with most developing countries the problem of having to find national unity in a heterogeneous population. The difficulty of Afghanistan, however, is further compounded by the fact that these disparate groups have been brought together by historical accident and not by any shared historical experience or urge to live together. Such a sharing of experience, in fact, becomes difficult when one race feels itself innately superior to others, whom it considers as irremediably second-class citizens and all political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of the former. The problems emanating from a uni-racial rule in a multi-racial country are bound to be complex and numerous. An attempt has been made in this paper to enumerate some of these problems, to mention the efforts made to resolve them, and to assess the degree of success that has attended these efforts.

The Divisive Factors

The term “Afghan” as applied to a group of people appears to have been used for the first time during the reign of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. Mahmud himself was of Turkish descent. The word “Afghanistan” is said to have been invented in the 16th and 17th centuries as a convenient term by the Mughals and “since then it has become current in the mouths of foreigners”.1 History contains no record of a state, or of its semblance, as Afghanistan, before 1747. Before that, for centuries, the eastern part of present-day Afghanistan formed part of the Moghul Empire, and the western of the Safavide empire of Iran. For long Kabul was the capital of Mughal territory west of the Indus. The second major town of Afghanistan, Qandhar, was a major bone of contention between these two empires until it was lost permanently to Persia during the time of Shah Jahan. Till the nineteenth century, the Shahs of Iran continued to “regard the territories of Afghanistan as a province of the Persian Empire”. An Afghan has thus been denied a long association with history as a state.

Secondly, the emergence of Afghanistan as a state during the last two centuries owed itself to Britain’s vital imperial necessity rather than any interest of the peoples of Afghanistan as a whole or even of any one group within the country in its formation. British authorities claimed: “we have contributed much to give a national unity to that nebulous community which we call Afghanistan (which Afghans never called by that name) by drawing a boundary all round it and elevating it into the position of a buffer state between ourselves and Russia”.3 Another historian has written: “it required external compression to be applied by the advancing empires of Britain and Russia to make the elements of cohesion in Afghanistan ultimately effective”.4 The conflicting interest of two imperial powers did not permit the other to establish itself in Afghanistan. The alternative to an armed clash over the territory was to transform it into a state and use it as a buffer. In order to ensure its usefulness as a buffer it was also in their interest to see that “rather than chaotic conditions a strong ruler reigned over Afghanistan”.5 Sir Thomas Holdich queried: “What is there about Afghanistan to guarantee its continued existence (as a buffer state between England and Russia)? No other country is interested in the prolonged existence of

* "Britain seemed to fear chaos in Afghanistan more than the unfriendliness of an Afghan ruler. Often the deterrent to war with Afghanistan was the fact that the British and at times also the Russians feared a defeated and leaderless Afghan more than hostile but neutral Afghan rulers.” Ludwig W. Adamec, "Afghanistan, 1900—1923, A Diplomatic History," pp. 4 and 10.
Afghanistan except these two”. This interest led to the determination of the frontier of Afghanistan in the west, south and east by the British, and in the north by the British and Russian governments.

After having brought Afghanistan into being, the need of a ruler who could hold Afghanistan together was always recognized by the British government, and in extreme cases its interest in an empirical solution even impelled the British government to decide the choice of the Amir from among various contestants. It is said that “Sardar Mohammad Ayub Khan’s presence at Qandhar was injurious to him, because the people there knew we were supporting Amir Abdur Rahman Khan. Ayub Khan’s followers declared afterwards that it was this support which ruined their master’s case and not anything which Amir Abdur Rahman Khan did.” Political support by the British government ensured the Amir’s occupation of the Afghan throne and subsidies paid and arms supplied by the British government to Afghan Amirs “enabled the Amirs to build their armies,” and consolidate their power in Afghanistan. Moreover, the expansion of Afghan territory owed much to British encouragement and support. In the words of a Soviet historian “after 1849 Dost Muhammad turned to the conquest of the non-Afghan peoples living north of the Hindukush (Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmans) with the support of the British India Company.”

Thirdly, as was perhaps inevitable under the circumstances, the power base in Afghanistan has constantly remained very narrow. Its exercise has been the privilege within the country of the Pashtuns, within the Pashtuns of the Durranis, and within the Durranis of the Barakzais for the last 170 years. For the last almost half a century during which power has rested with the Mohammadzai branch of the Barakzais clan, it has been controlled by “a small circle known as the ‘inner cabinet’ which consisted of key figures in the royal family,* and a few trusted intimates.” Command positions in the most significant force to emerge lately in Afghan domestic politics, namely, the army, too were held by members of the royal family and by its most loyal and trusted supporters. The successful coup led by Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan in July 1973, merely resulted in a change of the personalities in control of the affairs of the country but not in any diffusion of power. On the contrary it has led to the total concentration of power in the hands of one member of the former oligarchy.

Fourthly, Afghan society, already divided among heterogeneous ethnic groups, has been further handicapped by the absence of any geographical unity. “Each of these ethnic groups, whether settled or nomadic, is largely concentrated in particular sections of the country.” Attempts aimed at achieving some kind of homogeneity have repetitively taken the form of settling large Pashtun colonies in non-Pashtun areas, but the Hindukush remains the major dividing line.

All these factors, historic incidence, the imperial rivalry of Britain and Russia, geographical separation, and a narrow power base, combined to prevent the peaceful growth of Afghanistan into a state in the real sense of the word. It was founded as a loose confederation of Pashtun tribes under Ahmad Shah Abdali’s leadership in 1747. Since then the Afghan national identity has remained synonymous merely with Pashtun nationalism. Despite the presence of many ethnic groups, Afghanistan has been a country run by Pashtuns and for the Pashtuns. The other groups have been with considerable justification called to be “the victims of an internal colonisation.” Afghan governments have been generally preoccupied with exclusively Pathan issues such as the Afghan irredentist campaign, the advancement of Pashto as the state language, etc. The latter has included “the required learning of Pashto in the schools, support for research in Pashto literature, and the enshrining of Pashto as the national language in article 35 of the 1964 consti-

* During the last years of King Zahir Shah’s reign, the circle dwindled to five persons. These were: former King Zahir Shah, Sardars Daud and Naim first cousins of the former King; Marshal Shah Wali Khan, the ex-King’s last surviving uncle; and Abdul Wali, Shah Wali Khan’s son and a military officer, married to the ex-King’s eldest daughter.
Without exception, Afghan cabinets have been dominated by Pushtuns. Completely out of proportion to the population ratio, for instance, a cabinet of sixteen, the number of non-Pashtuns has hardly exceeded one and very rarely two. Even this meagre presence has not necessarily always been ensured. Pashtuns have been appointed governors in most provinces, even where the population is predominantly of other ethnic groups “but a non-Pathan has never been appointed governor of a Pathan province.” The overwhelming majority of administrators are Pashtuns, most members of the officers’ corps in the armed forces are also Pashtuns, sons of Pashtun tribal chiefs.

Economic development was equally less evenly spread out. Virtually all schemes were concentrated in the Pashtun areas to the south and north-south-east of the Hindukush. The great schemes of agriculture development in Khost and the Helmand Valley, of forestry at Ali Khel, of hydro-electric power and agriculture irrigation in Nangrahar—these were all in Pashtun provinces; and even where development has been taking place in regions where other groups predominate, as with cotton ginning and processing in the north at Kunduz and along the Oxus, “it is often in an area with a Pashtun settler population dating from the Government’s deliberate shifting of Pathans to these areas before the Second World War.” Similarly, the great majority of Afghan industrial workers are Pashtuns, even in non-Pashtun areas. These industrial workers “are often members of those families who were moved into the non-Pashtun provinces and were never quite able to fit happily into the local community.” Thus the growing industrial elite is as Pashtun—dominated as the administrative elite.

The Process of Pashtun Domination

Scant material is available in the works of British historians on the process of Pashtun domination over the other races in Afghanistan. As a Pashtun-dominated Afghanistan was a major British interest, a more detailed account is found in the works of Soviet scholars on Afghanistan.

Amir Abdul Rahman (1880-1901) has been rightly called the Bismarck of Afghanistan. He broke whatever power was left with the Tajiks, Hazaras, Turkomans, and the Uzbegs. In a study entitled “The Ethnography of Afghanistan” by a group of Soviet scholars the process of the establishment of Pashtun domination over each of these ethnic groups has been described at some length. Not unexpectedly, many features in the conquest of these communities are common.

Writing about the Tajiks, the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan after the Pashtuns they have described the process of conquest in these words: “The establishment of the authority of the Afghan amirs in areas settled by Tajiks was accompanied by private confiscation of land from the local non-Pathan aristocracy, the forcible seizure of land from the working peasantry, and the transfer of un-worked lands to the state. The huge body of state land created in this way was distributed among Pathan immigrants who formed military colonies among the Tajiks. The Pathan nobility received part of the land and became a new stratum of land owners. Along with this, when the area was conquered by the Pathan feudal lords, the taxes on the local population increased while the Pathan land-owners availed themselves of tax privileges... Large groups of peasants began to abandon settled places and to leave for Turkestan in search of a living.”

The process was repeated with the Uzbegs. The Soviet scholars continue: “In the first half of the 19th century the Uzbegs, who were settled in what is now northern Afghanistan, constituted the feudal Khanat of Kunduz, Mazar, Shibberghan and

*After losing their state with the fall of the Samanids, the Tajiks fought stubbornly for their independence over the following centuries. Only in the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries did the Afghan feudal lords finally defeat the Tajik peasants of the Kabul Kandahar and Ghazni regions. In the 1830s a struggle which would last for several decades began between the Tajiks and the Afghan feudal lords. Not until the 1880s under Amir Abdur Rahman did the Afghans succeed in finally breaking the resistance of the Tajiks.
Maimena. They were dependent to a greater or lesser degree on the Amir of Bokhara. However, as early as the accession of Dost Muhammad the Afghan government began to conquer southern Turkestan including the Uzbeg Khanates. This process extended over several decades. In 1840-50, the Afghans annexed Balkh, Kunduz and other Khanates. It was only under Amir Abdur Rahman that the Afghan feudal lords finally took all the land between the Amu Darya (the Oxus) and the Hindukush. Than the Uzbeg Khanates were converted into a province of Afghanistan. During the decades of conquest by the Afghans, a considerable part of the Uzbek population left settled places. Later, as a result of sharp increases in land taxes, the emigration of Uzbegs took on even greater proportion. The land of the emigres and many local landowners was proclaimed state property and an intensive process of the colonization of the area was begun by Pathan feudal lords.17

The Soviet scholars have described the result in these words: “During the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman, after waves of uprising in Kataghan, Mazar-e-Sharif and Maimena, the colonization of Uzbeg lands increased. The Pathans coming from the south were allotted tax privileges and large land-holdings were given out to Pathan Khans. As a result Pathan tribes settled widely on the best Uzbeg lands and displaced a large number of Uzbeg peasants.”18

The Turkomans shared the same experiences. After describing how at the beginning of the 19th century the greater part of the Turkoman principalities had entered into a vassalage to Bokhara, the Soviet scholars write: “The Afghan Amir tried often to conquer the principalities but only under Amir Abdur Rahman were the Turkomans of the Andkhoi, Shibberghan and Maimena regions decisively included in Afghanistan”. This was in fact facilitated by the Russo-English demarcation of 1885-1887. “Many lands and pastures were taken from the Turkomans and given to Pathan landowners north of the Hindukush.” Broad masses Turkomans went into total dependence...on the Pathan aristocracy. Because they lost their plots (of land) as a result of the Pathan conquest, many settled Turkomans had to revert to the nomadic way of life. The majority of them became shepherds and herded the landowners’ flocks.19

But the worst fate fell to the Hazaras, as in their case sectarian was combined with ethnic difference. Unlike the Uzbegs and the Turkomans, the Hazaras had retained their independence. Neither historical sources nor Hazara legends give any indication of their prolonged submission to any outside power in the course of six centuries. In the 19th century they were completely independent and submitted only to their own leadership. The Soviet scholars write: “From the mid-19th century onwards, Yar Mohammad Herati and the Kabul empire undertook campaigns with the object of annexing Hazara territories, but it was only at the end of the 19th century, after prolonged and bitter fighting, that Amir Abdur Rahman defeated the Hazaras in 1891-93. *Afghan feudal lords and officials snatched a considerable portion of the land of the Hazarat. The Hazara peasantry was partly landless and partly subjected to cruel exploitation. Many Hazaras fell into slavery and remained in that state until it was abolished by Amanullah.”20 Writing in the 1890s John Grey mentioned that “in Kabul a short while ago a Hazara baby was bought for half a crown, and the purchaser got the mother for 15 shillings.”21 One source, noting that the Hazaras were at times traded for guns, ammunitions and horses, reported that “nearly every well-to-do establishment has one or two Hazara slaves.”22 Even after the abolition of slavery they have continued to have little economic or social status.

*“The punishment which the Hazara received must have been severe. It was openly said that pillars were made at points on the highways of the heads of slaughtered Hazaras as a warning to others who might contemplate a trial of strength with the existing government. The bazaars of Qandhar and of all the principal towns were said to be full of Hazara prisoners of both sexes who were sold as slaves. And at that time Hazara slaves were very cheap.” (Tate, p. 192).
In the 1960s a second Pashtun infiltration of the Hazara areas took place when about 60,000 Pashtuns from the plains were settled in the Hazarajat. No overt resistance was possible, but this settlement was not welcomed by the local population any more than the first.

Economic exploitation of the indigent Hazaras by the superior Pashtuns with capacity to lend money with exorbitant interest rates has further led to friction between the two racial groups.

The Afghan Political Structure and the non-Pashtun Groups:

After their complete and total subjugation by Amir Abdul Rahman, the non-Pashtuns have remained docile. The political system and administrative structure of Afghanistan did not provide any opportunity for the articulation or even the formulation of their grievances. Nevertheless, their resentment at the political and economic predominance of the Pashtuns has only grown with time. In recent years the regionalistic tendencies have accentuated to a much sharper extent than is known to the outside world. As already mentioned, in the case of the Hazara areas, sectarian difference further exacerbated the already existing considerable illwill between the two communities.

As mentioned, Pashtun domination over the non-Pashtuns was achieved through military conquest, and ended in the latter's total defeat. In a way, it was a conflict between Pashtun tribesmen and non-Pashtun urban population. The conquered towns had previously been controlled by merchants and artisans. The result of these conquests "has not been only a loss of urban political influence, but the collapse of organization, skills, and economic activity. Their markets constricted and they suffered from plundering and heavy taxation imposed by tribally and rurally oriented rulers... The picture presented until the late 19th century was that of dying urban communities. The subsistence orientation of the peasant and the nomad made them virtually independent of the towns economically, while their numbers and organization gave them political control in both town and countryside."²³

Contemporary writers have described the effects of the "rapacity" of the victorious Barakzai forces. The burden of their demands fell mainly on the Tajik section of the population. "The result is that in the immediate vicinity of towns no human voice greets or curses the visitor. Once rich vineyards are dried up and all around is desolation. This is specially the case in the Qandhar district where every fresh change of rulers has only brought increased taxation, until the population has been decimated and tax gatherers, enraged at not being able to squeeze money out of the mud walls, seized and sold into slavery the last inhabitant of once prosperous towns and villages."²⁴

The urban centres of eastern and southern Afghanistan, rather than the Afghan tribes, were the worst sufferers of the two Anglo-Afghan wars as well. While the country's meagre economy as a whole was undoubtedly damaged seriously, the urban population was badly hit by inflation and the scarcity of basic commodities. The population and the economy of Kabul and of the Kandhar regions declined sharply; the province of Herat also suffered enormous material losses.

No relief was in sight for the non-Pashtuns in view of the Afghan Amirs' own difficulties. The consolidation of their power was never an easy task for the Amirs. The threat to their position came mainly from their own kinsmen or other Durrani chiefs. Amir Habibullah Khan and King Zahir Shah have been the only two rulers to ascend and occupy their thrones (the latter for four decades) without a challenge. Whenever the throne was contested, which was generally the case, the issue was decided by the Pashtun tribesmen. In the conditions then obtaining in Afghanistan, involvement with these dynastic contests in some way represented the only form political activity could assume in that country. The non-Pashtuns were in no position to play any role in these contests and had no influence at all on their outcome. This possibility, too, of political advancement was thus closed to them.
While this avenue of political progress was closed, the evolution of Afghanistan's international personality, too, contributed towards a worsening of their position. With the demarcation of the Afghan international frontiers, and recognition of Afghan territorial integrity by Britain and Russia, the Afghan rulers were comparatively relieved of the anxiety about foreign intervention. and achieved greater freedom in dealing with their subjects. The Afghan rulers always suspected Persia of retaining an irredentist interest in the western part of Afghanistan, and Russia of an expansionist interest in the north, and knew that Afghan rule was most vulnerable in these two areas. They could, to a large extent, count on Britain's support in containing these threats. But basically the entire thinking of the Afghan rulers was conditioned by a fear that "Afghanistan's neighbours were essentially hostile and bent on territorial annexation." This is not the occasion to discuss Afghan foreign policy except to mention that the deliberate choice of a policy of isolationism was one of the means by which they not only met this threat, but which they also used successfully for mastering the domestic situation. It helped them in particular to insulate the non-Pashtun areas in the west and the north, and consolidate their rule over the peoples of those regions. This could not be achieved without the active assistance of the Pashtun tribesmen. Thus, in this way too, the authority of the state was identified with the rule of the Pashtuns and possible sources of opposition with the non-Pashtun population.

In brief, whatever political changes took place failed to ameliorate the condition of the non-Pashtuns. On the contrary, while politically their position did not improve, their economic condition only worsened.

Reform Measures

The Afghan political structure underwent a fundamental change four times since the foundation of the Afghan state in the time of Ahmad Shah Abadli in 1747. While the Amir remained at its apex, the bases of his power showed some change under different rulers. Ahmad Shah's "election" represented a degree of tribal consensus and his Kingdom may be called in essence a Pashtun tribal confederation. Dynastic struggles and internecine warfare within the Durrani tribe and between the Durranis and other Pashtun tribes particularly the Ghilzais, were the rule after his death until Amir Dost Mohammad Khan (1835-1839 and 1842-1863) succeeded in uniting the country largely as a consequence of the British invasion and occupation from 1839 to 1842. After his death the country reverted to dynastic struggle and chaos until Amir Abdur Rahman seized Kabul and declared himself Amir in 1880. Not until his reign, which lasted till his death in 1901, can Afghanistan be said to have begun to assume some of the attributes of modern nationhood. Until his time the authority of the central government had rested on the support of four groupings:

(1) the Pashtun tribes;
(2) religious leaders;
(3) the settled population in both rural and urban areas; and
(4) the productive economic groups.

Amir Abdur Rahman took one of the most fundamental steps in changing the power structure of Afghanistan by trying to create for the central government "an independent non-tribal power base. He went beyond merely keeping the tribes under control and proceeded to institutionalise the bureaucracy, the army and the monarchy." Until his time provincial government was primarily organized along tribal lines and each tribe ruled its own territory autonomously, guided from the capital by whatever the control the Amir could assert, usually through his army. In order to strengthen central government authority, Amir Abdur Rahman drew up provincial boundaries that cut through tribal territory and doubled the number of provinces. Subsequent rulers stabilized the new system so that pure tribal government no longer exists. He further weakened tribal authority by appointing the tribal chiefs to innocuous posts near him in Kabul.

Claiming to rule by divine right, he ended the autonomy enjoyed by the divines by incorporating them into government service and taking over religious endowments.
For the first time in Afghan history, Amir Abdur Rahman further tried to create a professional army which was to some extent loyal to the central government and independent of the tribal structure. The tribal levies, who formed the manpower in the army, were encouraged to develop personal loyalty to the Amir rather than their own tribes. He introduced limited western military technology and organization. The modernization process begun by him centered on the military establishment. It was expanded by his son Amir Habibullah who set up a military academy to train an Afghan officers corps.

Success in developing a strong national professional army was, however, only limited and it remained "essentially an emanation of the tribes." Until Amanullah's time the army's primary loyalty was still tribal rather than national. In fact the successful revolt against him was led by the Shinwaris of eastern Afghanistan and his successor King Nadir Shah was able to capture Kabul only with the assistance of the Wazirs and Mahsuds from the British Indian side of the frontier and funds raised by friends in Peshawar and the subsequent developments established the supremacy of the power of the tribes once again.

The new rulers, the Muhammadzais, realised the need of eliminating this precarious dependence on military support from the tribes. In fact, what was needed now was a force which could protect the state from the power of the tribes. This force could only be a well-equipped and disciplined army. The process of the creation of such a force reached its culmination during Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan's first prime ministership from 1953 to 1963. He built a standing army equipped with Soviet tanks, jets, rockets, bombers, and other equipment. The creation of this army "for the first time placed decisive response to a religious or almost any grouping of tribes into the hands of the central government."29

Any discussion of the relationship between the central government in Afghanistan and the tribesmen on the east of the frontier is beyond the scope of this paper. Two contradictory facts, however, emerge clearly from a study of its history. Firstly, that as a result of the deteriorating economic conditions, the weakness of the urban centres, and the autocratic and feudal character of the monarchy itself, the Afghan rulers were forced to depend increasingly on the Pashtun tribes for the defence of their country and the maintenance of their dynasty. The tribes also offered the only effective opposition (the "prickly hedge") that could be mustered by Afghan rulers to British power, and the only barrier against Britain's advance in Afghanistan.* Thus the tribesmen living in British territory not only played a decisive role in determining who among the various Durrani contestants was to hold power in Afghanistan, but also offered the surest guarantee for the integrity of Afghan territory. The Afghan rulers, therefore, wished to hold a position from which they could at least guide, as they could not control, the movement and direction of tribal enterprise. Secondly, irrespective of the occasional usefulness of the tribes to the Afghan Amirs, the latter, fully realising their inherent weakness, did in fact welcome British control over the tribesmen so that, as has been stated above, they may be freed to consolidate their own position in Afghanistan without the fear of tribal incursions. With the transfer of power in the subcontinent, Afghan rulers perhaps feared that as the successor state did not match Britain's power, the restraints on the tribesmen east of the Durand Line would break down and the alternative to the diversion of tribal energies eastward would be that they would turn westwards. They also needed an interregnum without tribal intervention for implementing necessary reforms. They felt that, at the same time, an expression of sympathy would protect their position among the tribesmen, simulate a national rallying point in a disparate country internally in Afghanistan, and internationally attract attention which would allow a

*"As the tribesmen provided a reservoir of fighting men which could be utilized against Britain if she should attempt to invade Afghanistan, it was in the interest of Afghanistan that British penetration be foiled and the tribes protected and armed." Adamjee, op. cit p. 77.
continuation of buffer politics. How far these gains would take the place of progress in achieving national cohesion is open to some doubt.

The relationship between the government in Kabul and the tribesmen in British territory remained a key factor in Afghan policy. The attitude of the non-Pashtun communities in Afghanistan does not appear to have been a matter of any significance in the consideration of this key factor. While some changes were taking place in the Afghan political system, these left them unaffected. As stated above, the process of the extension of the central government’s authority over the tribal chiefs was started by Amir Abdur Rahman and reached its culmination during the first premiership of Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan (1953-63). The changed balance was formally incorporated in the Afghan constitution of 1964. Article 2 of the constitution proclaimed that “all territories and localities which are under the sovereignty of the king constitute a homogenous whole, and in no respect can any distinction be made between parts of the country.” This article aimed at the abolition of tribal territory. Article 9 said that “all persons residing within the kingdom of Afghanistan are to be treated as Afghan subjects.” This article aims at the abolition of membership of tribes. Article 13 proclaimed the equality of all Afghan subjects. Article 26 forbade the collection of duties or taxes by anybody except the government. This abolished tribal administration. The methods of implementing these principles were simple. Following the practice introduced by Amir Abdur Rahman, the Government transferred the tribal chiefs to the capital and either gave them more or less harmless posts in the executive, legislative (upper house) or judiciary or sent them out as Governors to provinces at the opposite end of the country from their own tribal territory. Tribal administration was replaced by new regional organizations under government appointed officials. This process, started at the top of the tribal hierarchy, stretched down, to the smaller units.*

For the reasons stated, the efforts at modernization were concentrated primarily and mainly on the military. However, the reform in the military sector spilled over into other sectors and contributed to the establishment of a bureaucracy, an educational system and a few basic political institutions. Their importance follows that order. The large-scale economic assistance from foreign governments that was funnelled through the civil bureaucracy also generated an expansion of unprecedented scope in the structure, role, and importance of Afghanistan’s bureaucratic institutions. The civil servants exercised a liberalising influence. Like the civil servants, the intellectual elite outside the administration, like teachers, doctors, and college students have also generally favoured a liberalising of politics and a broadening of the base of government, a more egalitarian system and a diminution of the traditional influences. These “liberal” elements were able to exercise more influence after the retirement of Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan in 1963†. Nevertheless, the most significant force to emerge in the domestic political arena was the Afghan military. It was, and remains, the only organization in Afghanistan capable of acting in force on a nationwide scale. As already mentioned, its command positions were held by members of the royal family and by its most loyal and trusted supporters. But that was as far as the reforms were intended to go.

A brief clarification is necessary at this point. All traditional factors did not necessarily act as a divisive force. To a very large extent the reform programme of Afghan rulers was helped by the teachings of Islam and its influence on Afghan national life. While they had nothing else in common, the sense of community and brotherhood instilled by Islam provided

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*The process cannot be said to have reached down to tribes. For reasons of administrative difficulties in the more remote and smaller centres the administration is left to the local chiefs.

†“An authoritarian rule, the extent of which had evidently not been seen in Afghanistan since the reign of Abdur Rahman, was exercised by Daud through the instruments of a modern, loyal military force and a strengthened network of security police.” (Patrick J. Reardon, “Modernization and Reform: The Contemporary Endeavour” in Afghanistan, Some New Approaches, p. 164).
the much needed unifying force among the different peoples of Afghanistan. In their practice of Islam, the Afghans have shown greater success in retaining the egalitarian and democratic spirit of the faith than has perhaps been the case in many Muslim lands. This adherence to the teachings of Islam has prevented the practice of discrimination overtly and with the same harshness in every day life as is witnessed in some other Muslim lands. Secondly, the potent national force in Afghanistan has been Islam itself. It was the only force which could be used by Afghan rulers to mobilize opposition first against the Sikhs and later the British Government. However, although the principles of Islam permeate the 1964 constitution and it was declared as the official religion, official policy is encouraging a general substitution of the religious by a nationalistic ideology identified with Pashtun racism. In a significant remark ex-King Zahir Shah said: “the strength of the Muslim faith did not necessarily guarantee stability and national unity.” Increasing secularisation of the country's traditional institutions has inevitably followed this decision.

In order to accelerate the pace of national unification, while respecting the strength of Islam as a unifying force, in recent years the government has come to rely increasingly on other instruments of policy like opening the services to non-Pashtuns and a more even economic development of the different regions. Heavy investments are said to have been made in industry and agriculture north of the Hindukush and in areas far away from the capital like Herat. The projected Asian Highway has been proposed to pass through the Hazarajat, which will greatly help in opening that region for development. In fact, an overall improvement of roads as well is facilitating communication between different parts of the country.

At the same time, while traditionally the Pashtun tribes formed the reservoir of manpower for the armed forces, the sources of recruitment have been expanded. Conscription is helping to bring persons from different communities together and contributing to the lowering of the barriers between them.

The Afghan Dilemma

As mentioned the framework in which the rulers of Afghanistan are now trying to promote national unity can be described as a combination of two major but contradictory principles: viz. (1) encouragement to the gradual growth of a national Afghan, rather than as in the past a Muslim, identity, overriding ethnic and linguistic divisions, through legal and administrative reforms, and by increasing the participation of non-Pashtun groups in the government and their share in the economic development of the country, and (2) at the same time preserving the strength of traditional forces, in other words, respecting Pashtun dominance.

They are trying, if I may repeat, to achieve the first objective through:

(1) the conferment of the legal status of Afghan on non-Afghans as well;

(2) the modernizing of the administrative structure:

(3) improving communications, bringing the different regions closer; in particular the opening up of the Hazarajat:

(4) providing more job opportunities to members of the non-Pashtun ethnic groups:

(5) planning a more even economic development with considerable emphasis on the industrial and agricultural development of the northern and western, predominantly non-Pashtun, areas.

In order to achieve the second objective, Pashtun dominance continues to be equated with national and cultural unity, and there is no change from the past in this regard. The army, modernized and equipped with latest weapons, remains the principal instrument for imposing national unity and maintaining the authority of the central government. As stated, the command positions in the army are occupied by a small group of members of the (former)
royal family and its most loyal and trusted supporters. There is no change in the approach towards the cultural autonomy of the other groups. In fact, for the first time, in the basic law of the country itself Pashto has been declared as the national language. and is being developed, although both remain official languages, at the expense of Persian (Dari).

As will be seen, it has been possible for the Afghan government to carry out its programme of limited reforms with the help of a modernized bureaucracy, supported by a modernized army. But all reform measures have fallen short of a change in the most essential sector of national life, the political. Reforms have been imposed and have not originated from a popular source of authority. Political activity in Afghanistan has been generally suppressed or at best severely restricted. The formation of political parties is still prohibited. It was generally expected after the promulgation of the 1964 constitution that the political parties bill will be passed. However, the former King witheld his consent, it is believed, on the ground that, at least in the beginning, the formation of political parties around ethnic groups will become unavoidable and the fragile fabric of national unity set up so cautiously will not be able to withstand the pressure of heady racial politics and will break-down completely. But in the absence of legitimate party organization, it is natural for political elements to get together under other influences. In Afghanistan the factor which would attract maximum sympathy is ethnic affiliation. They feel that "they are the poor country cousins and the Pathans are lording over them to the point of oppression."

And they are denied any outlet for ventilating their grievances. In this way, the maintenance of the existing Pashtun domination has become dependent on the absence of any organized political activity particularly among the non-Pashtuns. The conflict is, thus, reduced in basic terms to a competition for power and wealth on a national basis between the two unequal ethnic forces.

This remains the essential Afghan dilemma. The status quo is synonymous with Pashtun dominance, but a successful reforms programme requires a total national effort, i.e., the participation of all groups on an equal footing in all areas: political, administrative, economic, social and cultural. This participation cannot be denied for too long now. Only when they can participate freely and on equal terms will any success in realising the national aim of reforms be achieved.

The coup led by Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan in July last year merely transferred power from one sub-section to another within the same family. The abolition of the monarchy represented only a formal change. The coup followed the familiar pattern of dynastic struggles in Afghanistan. Like those contests this, too, was decided by the armed forces, with the principal role being played by influential persons from the same small group. It has not meant an end to oligarchic rule in Afghanistan or any broadening of the political base and popular participation in the making of policy. In particular, the non-Pashtun communities remain as much excluded from any share in authority as they were before.

Summary

To sum up, the unity imposed upon Afghanistan continues to rest on the use of force and on the interplay of interantional forces. It is not based on popular support or on the free consent of all Afghans. It thus lacks a secure foundation. Afghanistan has substituted a republic for a monarchy. It has introduced some socio-economic reforms which are aimed at bringing benefit

*Pashto has been made compulsory in schools. Proficiency in Pashto is required for appointment to senior government positions. The Pashtun Academy and Afghan Historical Society have been set up to sponsor research in Pashtun history and culture as Afghan national history and culture.

It may be mentioned in this connection that one of political demands of the students in their demonstration in October, 1965 was for "the cessation of the Afghan Government's manipulation of the Pashto-Dari language difference", in other words, the promotion of Pashto over Dari. According to same report, the recent trouble which eventually led to the ouster of Communication Minister Abdul Hamid was also connected with this grievance.
to all sections of the population. But no change has taken place in the basic political structure of the country. The first step in that direction has to be the conversion of a Pashtun-dominated to a pluralistic Afghan society. The introduction of representative institutions cannot be postponed much longer. Afghanistan stands at the crossroads.
NOTES


2. G.P. Tate, “The Kingdom of Afghanistan”, p. 2. Mountstuart Elphinstone, however, writing in 1815 said “The Afghans have no general name of their country; but that of Afghanistan, which was probably first employed in Persia, is frequently used in books, and is not unknown to the inhabitants”, Kingdom of Cauboul, I, p. 125.


5. Griffiths, ibid, p. 16.


8. Richard S. Newell, “The Politics of Afghanistan”, p. 48. Amir Dost Mohammad was able to reunite (after Ahmad Shah Abdali) and centralize the Afghan provinces in the north, west, and south, with British assistance in the form of subsidies and guns. (Vartan Gregorian “The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan” p. 104). The Amirs were never in doubt that they had to depend upon the British for the military and economic support necessary for their effective Government of Afghanistan. (Newell, op, cit, p. 43). Similar support was extended by the British to Amir Abdur Rehman. “As a realist, the Amir saw that he was ceding authority over tribes which he himself could not control, in return for a renewed British guarantee of political support and an increased subsidy with which to build his army” (Newell, op. cit. p. 48). Amir Abdur Rehman “put the perfection of his power ahead of other consideration.”

British interest in the consolidation of the powers of strong Amirs has been noted by historians. The fear, raised by the extension of the Russian railway system into Central Asia, of Russia’s taking military and political advantage of disturbed conditions loomed large in the mind of British authorities. It was one of their persistent fears that “the Russians might try to stir up the population of northern Afghanistan in an effort to detach the regions from Afghan control”. (Curzon, Russia in Central Asia, quoted in Gregorian, op. cit, p. 110). One of Britain’s chief aims consistently was “to prevent the Russians from attempting to manipulate the non-Afghan ethnic groups of northern Afghanistan to procure a foothold in that country”. (Gregorian, op. cit. page 117).


Conditions obtaining earlier have been described by another Soviet expert on Afghanistan, I.M. Reysner, in his introduction to the Afghan writer Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar's book on Ahmed Shah Abdali. Reysner writes:

There was a strong distinction between the full citizens the members of the free Afghan tribes, and the dependent non-Afghan population who were generally called hamsayas (vassals or clients) or faqirs. The latter were the most exploited section of the population and therefore economically the most valuable. The free Afghans owned inherited plots of land and paid few or no taxes. The hamsayas, on the other hand, were prevented from owning land and paid heavy taxes. They had limited rights and were in some cases serfs. The Afghan tribal system was based on the exploitation of the hamsayas. (The Borderland of Soviet Central Asia, Afghanistan. Central Asian Review. Vol. 8, No. 2, 1960)

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21. Quoted in Gregorian, op. cit., footnote, p. 34.
22. Holdich, Gates of India, quoted in Gregorian, ibid.
27. “Three times General Nadir Khan attempted to advance into the Logar Valley and three times he was driven back, losing the provincial capital Gardez. Finally in August, Nadir Khan asked the Government of India to allow him to recruit Wazir tribesmen from the British side of the Durand Line for a last desperate effort to reach Kabul. The request was peremptorily refused, but the time passed for Nadir to pay much heed to such niceties of international procedure. In despair he put forward the pretence of withdrawing from the whole enterprise and asked the Government of India to intervene in Kabul to secure the safety of his family. While they were pursuing their humane purpose, Nadir Khan was busy recruiting Wazirs and Mahsuds from across the Durand Line in British territory in defiance of their injunction. In the middle of September his army entered the Logar Valley. “The tribes mainly from the Indian side from the Durand Line had formed the spear-head of Nadir's attack on Kabul.” (Fraser-Tytler, Sir W. Kerr, “Afghanistan”. p. 221 and 209).

Again in 1938 the Wazirs and Mahsuds from the British side of the border, inspired by the Shami Pir set out once more to remove Nadir Shah’s son who was on the throne and restore Amanullah. This effort was checked “only at the last moment by the strenuous efforts of British officers".


30. In an audience given to Donald Wilber, quoted in his article "Structure and Position of Islam in Afghanistan" in the Middle East Journal for Winter, 1952.

31. Under the constitutions of both 1923 and 1964, "all persons residing in the Kingdom of Afghanistan are considered to be subjects of Afghanistan", and "the word Afghan applies to each citizen ..."


34. Poullada writes: "During our stay in Kabul (1967-68) our baghban (gardener), a member of a minority, tribal group, often spoke with bitter resentment about 'those Afghans' referring to the Pashtun ruling elite". (Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, footnote, p. 3).

35. It may be clarified that the non-Pashtuns do not form one consolidated ethnic force.
### POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

The population of Afghanistan is divided as follows in terms of ethnic origin:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakhtuns</td>
<td>4.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajiks</td>
<td>2.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbegs</td>
<td>1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazaras</td>
<td>over 1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aimaks</td>
<td>.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmen</td>
<td>5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (Nursistains, Khirghiz, Qizilbashes, Arabs, Sikhs, Hindus etc.)</td>
<td>2.0 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total is estimated at between 11-13 million. No official census has been taken in Afghanistan. These figures represent recent rough estimates of the Afghan Government and are generally quoted in most studies/books on Afghanistan.
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