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Problems in Establishing Legitimacy in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been called a "highway of conquest," the pivot of Central Asia that led armies to India and Iran, to the rich lands of the Transoxiana and the borders of China. Since the beginning of recorded history, its territory has fallen victim to waves of conquerors and been part of much larger empires. Indeed, while each ethnic group in the country can claim some periods of glorious history, none can make an absolute indigenous claim to the region: their histories all begin with the displacement or incorporation of some preceding group already occupying the land. Yet in more recent times Afghanistan has become famous as the graveyard of imperial ambitions, having rebuffed the British twice in the nineteenth century and forced the Soviet Union to withdraw in defeat in the twentieth. How is it that a territory that was historically overrun by every major power in pre-modern times became so indigestible in the last 150 years? And why has the United States, in at least its initial foray into Afghanistan, not provoked the high level of opposition that is habitually assumed to await the arrival of any foreign troops there? The answer lies in the changing relationship between war and political legitimacy, a change that grew out of reformulation of the conception of society and government itself. It is this change in the conception of legitimacy that has made the restoration of internal national order in Afghanistan so difficult.

Pre-modern Patterns of Establishing Legitimacy in Central Asia and Beyond

States have historically used wars of conquest as one way to incorporate contested territory into their polities. The fact that war has so often been considered to be the ultimate arbiter of disputes disguises a set of related questions: who is a conqueror at war with, what authority does he derive from his act of violence, and how can physical coercion be transformed into legitimate authority?

For pre-modern states and their rulers war was a competition among rival elites to control a subject population. Following the lines of Thomas Hobbes's political theory (set forth in the *Leviathan* [1651]), any government was superior to anarchy and therefore subjects had the duty to obey rulers who in turn were obliged to protect their subjects' lives from the predation of other people within the state and invaders from without. Leaders were not accountable to their subjects but, on the other hand, subjects were not expected to remain loyal to leaders who could not fulfill their roles as protectors. Civil war or rebellion was worse than

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any foreign invasion because it threatened the death of the polity, while conquest (even foreign conquest) only threatened to change its leaders.

Although removed in time, place, and culture from the English civil war of the seventeenth century that inspired Hobbes's observations, the rulers of Central Asian states viewed the world in much the same way. For example, in 1006 the city of Balkh in northern Afghanistan was attacked by the Qarakhanids, a dynasty ruling a confederation of nomad tribes that had recently come out of the Central Asian steppes to conquer today's Uzbekistan. The inhabitants of Balkh put up stiff resistance against the invaders but in the end the city fell. Balkh was pillaged and the main bazaar (owned by the sultan) burned to the ground. Mahmud of Ghazni, the displaced sultan, quickly dispatched a large army and drove the invaders out. He then berated the people of Balkh for attempting to defend their city:

> What do subjects have to do with war? It is natural that your town was destroyed and that they burnt property belonging to me, which had brought in such revenues. You should be required to pay an indemnity for the losses, but we pardoned you; only see to it that it does not happen again: if any king (at a given moment) proves himself the stronger, and requires taxes of you and protects you, you must pay taxes and thereby save yourselves.[1]

Central Asian rulers thus looked upon war and conquest as the business of displacing rival elites, a process having little or nothing to do with the inhabitants of the territory. The ultimate targets of this expropriation were viewed as passive, having no more role to play in politics than a herd of sheep would have in choosing its shepherd. Rulers were aided in this conception by a hierarchical political culture that isolated rulers from subjects. Ordinary people, Sanjar, the Saljuk Sultan of Iran (r. 1097–1157) explained, were a breed apart: "They do not know the language of kings, and any idea either of agreeing with their rulers or of revolting against them is beyond them; all their efforts are devoted to one aim, to acquire the means of existence and maintain wife and children; obviously they are not to be blamed for this, and for enjoying constant peace."[2]

Only certain men from ruling descent groups were believed to have the right to compete for power.[3] Hence the constant theme in Central Asian politics of a losing prince from one state appearing with a small band of followers in another, raising troops and setting out to establish his own empire. If politics was your hereditary business, then the question was how to find your own niche. Success in war was key (although marriage alliances were helpful in gaining support). You need not convince the new population of your rights,

[1]V.V. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion* (London, 1968), 291.

[2]Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, 377.

[3]In addition certain physical defects were considered debilitating. For example, in Afghan politics losers were often blinded instead of killed because this rendered them ineligible to rule and removed them from the game.

but merely dispossess the existing elite. War was thus an effective way to gain and retain power because victory provided legitimacy. While conquered cities often rebelled after a conquest, this was less a challenge to the legitimacy of its government than a test of its staying power. Populations were rarely punished for such acts beyond the execution of the ringleaders and confiscation of property.[4]

Success in war demanded an army, and the armies of these states consisted primarily of paid mercenaries or slave soldiers. It was the army that constituted the real body politic, for its lack of support doomed a ruler. Such troops were usually a fickle bunch. The Persian poet Sa'di (1258) devoted a whole section of his stories and verse to the problems of kings, including many on how power can be won and lost:

> One of the ancient kings neglected the government of
> his realm and kept the army in distress. Accordingly
> the whole of it ran away when a powerful enemy
> appeared. If he refrains from giving treasure to the
> troops. They refrain from putting their hands to the
> sword. What bravery will they display in battle array
> When their hands are empty and affairs deplorable? . . .
> A sultan who grudges money to his troops, they cannot bravely risk their lives for him.
> Give gold to the soldier that he may serve thee.
> If thou witholdest gold, he will serve elsewhere.
> When a warrior is full, he will be brave in-fight but if his belly be empty, he will be brave in flight.[5]

Failures of Incorporation at the Margins of Empire

If there was an alternative model to this system, it was to be found among the tribal warriors who inhabited the marginal zones of steppe, mountains, and deserts of the region. Organized through segmentary kinship groups which were often egalitarian in social structure and prone to reject the legitimacy of any hereditary leadership, they had a high rate of participation in warfare, open political systems, and rarely considered defeat in war anything other than a temporary setback. They had long experience with state societies and a capacity to resist them, sometimes through mobility (particularly pastoral nomads such as the Baluch, Kirghiz, Kazakh, or Turkmen in the steppes and deserts) and sometimes through the defensive advantage of their resource poor mountainous homelands (such as the Pashtuns or Kurds). In ibn Khaldun's terms such communities

[4]Except for Mongol Empire's Chinggis Khan, who, not understanding the ritual nature of such challenges, had the populations of rebellious cities exterminated so that there would be no cities to rebel in the future.

[5]Sa'di. *The Gulistan* (Book 1, #14), trans. Edward Rehatsek (New York, 1965), 48–49.

were examples of "desert civilization": poor, tough, mean, and fractious people, who were best let alone.[6]

At any given time groups organized around segmentary lineages might fight with one another or unite together depending on the problem at hand. As a widespread ethnographic cliché in the region explains, "It is me against my brothers; it is my brothers and me against our cousins; and it is our cousins, my brothers and me against the world." In such a system the numerous petty disputes and blood-feuds that ordinarily divided rival lineages could be set aside in the face of a common threat, but the old divisions reemerged once the common enemy was gone. Leaders had little formal power to command because their authority depended on building consensus to create a coalition of the willing. In the absence of such a consensus they had no power to command obedience or to punish the recalcitrant. The larger the group involved the harder it was to lead, in part because there was a natural inclination to reject the permanent authority of any paramount leader who came from a rival kin group.

Because such groups inhabited territory that could not be profitably administered or easily subdued, they remained autonomous or had only indirect ties to dynasties based in cities that dominated the most productive agricultural land and trade routes. Tribes in the marginal regions could create problems by raiding more prosperous areas, but they could rarely challenge a powerful state except when its power had already been weakened from within. And since regional states often simply let such people be (a legacy still alive in Pakistan's NWFP tribal territories and in parts of southeastern Afghanistan under the Durrani monarchy), their autonomy did not challenge the legitimacy of existing states. It was here, along today's Afghan-Pakistan border, that the famous Pashtun warrior and poet of the seventeenth century, Khushal Khan Khattak, railed against the attempts of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb to preserve his authority in the autonomous tribal areas that had risen in revolt. However, during Khattak's lifetime, the Pashtun tribes were more a nuisance than a threat to the Mughals because they never created a unified leadership.

Thus the groups most resistant to existing hierarchical state structures in Central Asia were generally left outside of them. One reason for why states did not give a high priority to enforcing direct administrative rule within these areas was that indirect rule was often cheaper and more effective. The tradition of bribing local notables and even whole tribes was well established. In addition, because these regions were usually economically weak, tribes that could resist military pressure were often vulnerable to economic coercion. Economic sanctions were a powerful weapon in the hands of a state administration because the marginal tribal areas needed the cities for the necessities of life (metals, tools, surplus grain, cloth, etc.) and access to these could be cut off if they caused too many problems.[7]

[6]ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, abridged edition, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, 1967).

[7]ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 122.

There were of course many times when peoples from the marginal zones did move into areas historically governed by states. Many came as immigrants, attracted by the prospects of farming more fertile lands or lured by the higher standard of living available in the region's cities. Under these circumstances they became part of a detribalized peasantry or urban proletariat. But more strikingly, even when they came as conquerors, they did not destroy the old power structure. Instead the ruling elite adopted the trappings of state power and used their new power to reduce the autonomy of their own people. For example, when the Pashtun tribes came to occupy the rich irrigated plains around Peshawar or Kandahar, their leaders became hereditary landowners and their fellow tribesmen were reduced to the status of clients. Leadership of lineages became institutionalized and was inherited from one generation to the next. Even when they owned their own land, ordinary tribesmen had no choice but to accept state control, give up their autonomy, and pay taxes. This transformation was so profound that to this day those tribes that remained in the hills and deserts continue to draw a sharp distinction between themselves with their tax-free way of life (*nang*) and those Pashtuns who live under state control (*qalang*). The hill tribes assert that it is only they who follow the true Pashtun way because their cousins on the plains and in the cities have been stripped of any true autonomy and are forced to obey state regulations.[8]

Conquering Pre-modern Afghanistan

For most of its history the territory of Afghanistan was easily conquered and ruled by foreign invaders who used success in war as their justification. Because Afghanistan is located on a fracture zone linking Iran in the west, Central Asia in the north, and South Asia in the east, it was the route of choice for conquerors moving across the Hindu Kush into India. Indeed it had a positively magnetic attraction for conquerors, not because they coveted the wealth of Afghanistan but rather because control of Afghanistan gave access to more prosperous places like India or Central Asia, or because it gave them control of regional trade routes. While the popular press often repeats the claim that no conqueror, including such figures as Alexander the Great or Chinggis Khan, ever succeeded in subduing the country, this is untrue. In reality almost all of them did conquer the lands that now comprise Afghanistan and did not have a particularly hard time holding on to the territory they had won. The main problem they faced was attacks by rival states, not rebellions by the inhabitants.

As a result, for most of the past 2500 years today's Afghanistan was a component of larger empires, and very often constituted a frontier zone of conflict between neighboring states. These had their centers in Iran (Achaemenid, Parthian, Sassanian, Il khanate, Safavid), in India (Mauryan, Gupta, Mughal), or Central Asia (Mongol, Timurid, Uzbek). When Afghanistan was the center

[8]Akbar Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society* (London, 1980).

of government (Kushan, Ghaznavid and Ghurid empires), it served as primarily as a base of military operations for states that drew most of their revenue from India or Central Asia. Reviewing a set of historical maps illustrates this clearly. What might be even more striking to contemporary Afghans is that none of these states were ruled by Pashtuns. After the year 1000, most of the dynasties that ruled the territories that are today part of Afghanistan were either of Turco-Mongolian origin or had militaries that were dominated by Turco-Mongolian peoples. These peoples also had a tribal organization, but it was far more hierarchical and centralized than tribal organizations found in southwest Asia and it proved militarily superior to them.[9] The Pashtuns would only become a governing elite after 1747, and when they did the structure of their state was closer to that of their Turco-Mongolian predecessors than to Pashtun tribal tradition.

For these reasons, the assumption that a British occupation of Afghanistan in the nineteenth century was inherently doomed to failure was far from obvious at the time. In retrospect it has been taken for granted that all Afghan leaders and the population as a whole were naturally predisposed to reject any foreign presence in the country. But historically this had not been the case. Babur, for example, had come out of Central Asia and used Kabul as his first base in the establishment of the Mughal Empire in India without arousing the ire of the Afghan population. And later Afghan kings had just as many problems dealing with the Pashtun tribes in the marginal zones as did their Mughal or Safavid predecessors. Nor was cooperation with a non-Muslim power itself an irreconcilable problem. The Pashtuns had come to agreements and even accepted the sovereignty of non-Muslim Sikhs in the areas east of the Khyber Pass. In contrast to the newly powerful Sikhs, who seemed to threaten the existence of the Afghan state, the British appeared as possible allies who were keen for their own reasons to preserve the weakening Durrani Pashtun dynasty. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century the Afghans found British India a good place to exile losing rivals in their power struggles.

The Rise of the Pashtuns

Although the Pashtuns claim a very ancient history in Afghanistan they do not begin to play a significant political role until the mid-eighteenth century. Around 1500 today's Afghanistan was divided almost equally between Safavids in Iran, the Mughals in India, and Uzbeks in Trans-Oxiana. Kabul initially served as the summer capital of the Mughals and the dynasty's founder, Babur, so loved the city that he was buried there. Soutwestern Afghanistan (Herat and lower Helmand regions) was firmly held by the Iranian Safavids. Kandahar was a disputed frontier for both and control of the region passed periodically

[9]Thomas Barfield, "Tribe and State Relations: The Inner Asian Perspective," in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East, ed. Philip S. Koury and Joseph Kostiner* (Berkeley, 1991), 153–185.

between them. It passed permanently into Safavid control only during the mid-seventeenth century as Mughal power weakened in India. The Uzbeks held most of the lands north of the Hindu Kush Mountains.

It was the Ghilzai Pashtuns, long in revolt against Mughal control, who gained preeminence in the Kandahar region under the Safavids at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Their experience playing on the political rivalries to break free of Mughal Indian control to become the Safavid governors of Kandahar had allowed the Ghilzais to steal a march on their Abdali Pashtun rivals whose power base eventually shifted west to Herat. As a result of a failed revolt initiated by the Baluch in 1703 the Ghilzai governor of Kandahar, Mir Wais, was exiled to the Safavid capital of Isfahan. This familiarized him both with court politics and the weakness of the dynasty. Upon his return to Kandahar he instigated an even greater and more successful rebellion in 1709. He beat back a Safavid punitive expedition and expelled them and their Abdali Pashtun allies in 1711. The latter then also revolted against the Safavids and made Herat independent in 1717. Such successes in war and diplomacy gave the Ghilzais both the organizational skills and the military capacity to overthrow the weakened Safavids in 1722. In a rapid military campaign, aided by sheer good luck and the enemy's incompetence, the Ghilzai Pashtuns seized the capital of Isfahan and brought about the demise of this once powerful dynasty.[10]

The success of the Afghans in displacing the Safavids was evidence that rule was still determined by struggles among competing elites and had little to do with the populations they ruled over. But once having seized power the Ghilzais proved incapable of consolidating their rule. Their authority quickly waned and opened a period of tribal resurgence in which Turkish groups from Khorasan came to the fore. From here Nadir Shah Afshar (r. 1736–47) mobilized a wide variety of tribal forces (including the Abdali Pashtuns) to create a powerful but ultimately ephemeral empire. It was particularly notable for its defeat of the Mughals and the sack of Delhi. To hold his troops together Nadir Shah had to reward them lavishly with loot from campaigns and with payments derived from heavy taxes on all the territories under his rule. His state collapsed with his murder and the eastern part then broke away under the leadership of one of his lieutenants, Ahmad Khan, an Abdali Pashtun, who proclaimed the Durrani Empire in 1747.[11]

If not for Nadir Shah's unexpected death, the Pashtuns might once again have found themselves a subordinate part of another empire in that long series of Mongol and Turkish empires that had dominated the region so effectively for more than 700 years. But both the Ghilzai and the Abdali leaders had picked up new skills ruling places like Herat and Kandahar and proved capable of creat-

[10]Laurence Lockhart, *The fall of the Safavi dynasty and the Afghan occupation of Persia* (Cambridge, 1958).

[11]Laurence Lockhart, *Nadir Shah: A Critical Study Based Mainly upon Contemporary Sources* (London, 1938).

ing a true state structure when the opportunity presented itself. It was no accident that they, not the independent Pashtuns of the tribal hinterlands, formed the first Pashtun-ruled state. But because the establishment of the Durrani Empire is usually the starting point for the modern history of Afghanistan, there is a tendency to overlook the fact that the Pashtuns had not organized themselves for the conquest of the territories they were to govern. Rather they were the heirs to the eastern half of a much larger Iranian empire that had been created by Nadir Shah Afshar. This becomes apparent when we look at how Ahmad Khan came to be its founder.

Ahmad Khan served as treasury official for Nadir Shah and had led a contingent of 4000 horse cavalry. Upon Nadir's death he collected much of the old regime's treasure (including the famous Koh-i-nur diamond) and moved his troops to Kandahar. There he was chosen to be the leader of the Abdali Pashtuns in a tribal *jirga*. As the story goes, he did not seek this position but rather had it thrust upon him during a deadlock in the debate over which Abdali clan chieftain should be chosen as overall leader when a famous holy man intervened on his behalf and proclaimed him *Padshah, Durr-i-Durran* (Pearl of Pearls). His Abdali clansmen thereupon styled themselves "Durrani" and Ahmad Khan retitled himself Ahmad Shah.[12] At his accession to the throne the Durrani Empire encompassed today's Afghanistan and the Mughal borderland of Sind, Punjab, and Kashmir.

The focus on the *jirga* debate in most histories implies that it was the Pashtuns alone who raised Ahmad Khan to power and that he was a product of the existing tribal structure. Neither supposition is accurate. His true power was based on his position as a former Afshar official who had taken command of the old regime's troops in the area and had the largest amount of treasure at his disposal. He was also strongly supported by the non-Afghan Qizilbash who had significant military strength. Lacking their own tribal base they were personally loyal to Ahmad Khan their commander. And it is unlikely that that the man who had run off with the bulk of Nadir's available treasure and had non-tribal cavalry contingents under his personal command was really such a bashful presence in a council of his own people. Because Ahmad Khan already had a broad base of support beyond the Pashtuns, the Durrani well knew that it was only by rallying around him that they could hope to keep control of the territories that had fallen into their hands and to permanently displace their Ghilzai rivals in Kandahar.

Changing Patterns of Legitimacy: Nineteenth Century Afghanistan

The Durrani Empire was not a Pashtun tribal confederation but a centralized military regime that depended on paid mercenaries and subject tribes who could be mobilized only through their own leaders who also expected to be rewarded. The revenue that kept such a system running was derived primarily

[12]Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani* (London, 1959).

from the empire's rich Indian provinces of Sind, Punjab, and Kashmir, Afghan Turkestan and Persian Khorasan. From the beginning the Durranis found themselves on the defensive. Ahmad Shah spent his entire career fighting campaigns to retain his most valuable territories, but by the time of his death in 1772 the Afghan state had lost ground to the Sikhs in India, the Uzbeks in Central Asia, and the Persians in Khorasan. By the early nineteenth century they had lost all of their most valuable Indian territories, including Kashmir and the Punjab, to the growing power of the Sikhs. And soon it was not just the outer territories that fell out of their control: the fertile Pashtun lands around their winter capital of Peshawar were captured by the Sikhs in 1834.

The loss of its Indian territories and tribute from the Mughal kings was a severe blow to the Durrani state because these had provided the bulk of the resources that supported the army and the payments needed to keep the frontier tribes quiet. These losses put the Durrani dynasty at risk. The Pashtun regions around Kandahar or in the eastern mountains were too poor to support such a military government on their own and the tribes were generally unwilling to provide troops without payment (or at least the prospect of loot). They were also politically unreliable. Although Ahmad Shah had raised the Durrani Pashtuns to prominence as a ruling group, his successors never treated the tribes as partners. Indeed, immediately upon taking the throne after Ahmad Shah's death in 1772, his son, Timur Shah, moved the capital from Kandahar to Kabul (outside the Pashtun tribal territory) in an attempt to reduce their influence. He also surrounded himself with Qizilbash cavalry as his personal bodyguard and counterweight to the Pashtun tribes. But as the empire contracted, internal turmoil increased. After Timur Shah's death in 1793, succession struggles became increasingly common. This eventually resulted in open conflict within the Durrani elite between the powerful Popalzai and Barakzai clans over who should rule Afghanistan in the 1820s. But as individuals seized power, lost power, and plotted to regain power, the patterns of authority differed very little from that practiced centuries earlier: rivals for leadership were all members of a large dynastic house that was more concerned about coups from within than by displacement from without. Legitimacy meant seizing power and displacing relatives, not competing with other groups. And as much as the subordinate groups may have resented Durrani power, even potentially powerful ones like the Ghilzai Pashtuns never mobilized themselves to challenge the hegemony of the Durranis.

The Anglo-Afghan Wars

This pattern changed with the arrival of the British who ushered in a period that would see a transformation of the traditional Afghan political and military organization and produced a new national political identity. The crucible of this change was the two wars the Afghans fought with the British (1839–1842 and 1878–1880), or more accurately the consequences these wars brought in their train.

For at the beginning of the nineteenth century Afghan concepts of political legitimacy were still firmly rooted in the past. Competition for state power was assumed to be restricted to a small elite and their replacement meant very little to the ordinary people on the ground. By the end of the century, Afghanistan would have a ruler who saw himself, and acted as, the leader of a nascent national state in which a regular army replaced tribal levies and mercenaries and a centralized state and national bureaucracy displaced formerly autonomous regional leaders and their feudal clients. The role of the Afghan population would also change as it became more involved in struggles over national political power.

First Anglo-Afghan War and Amir Dost Muhammad

The first point of transition was the relatively short occupation of Afghanistan by Britain that was later known as the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–1842). This can be seen through the two reigns of Amir Dost Muhammad who (fortunately for purposes of comparison) ruled Afghanistan both before and after the British occupation.[13]

Dost Muhammad had come to power in 1826 in the classic fashion of elite politics when one branch of the dynastic line, the Muhammadzai Durranis, displaced another, the Sadozai Durranis, as rulers of Afghanistan. For the next ten years Dost Muhammad spent most of his time consolidating his limited power and extending it beyond Kabul. Initially he had to contend with troubles caused by the old ruler, Shah Shuja, who had fled to India and sought British protection, as well as rivalries within his own immediate family. He also devoted considerable efforts to putting down local revolts and increasing the Afghan state's revenue base. Since the kingdom had lost its most significant source of revenue in India to the Sikhs, developing the resources inside Afghanistan became much more of a priority even when such actions provoked resistance. He also reached out to the British in hopes of recovering Peshawar from the Sikhs. This he did not get but he did receive British aid in defending the city of Herat from the Persians (1837–38). War had brought Russians into contact with the Afghans because they were aiding Iran. Just how weak his position was became apparent when the British decided to restore Shah Shuja to the throne in 1839 and occupy Afghanistan themselves. Dost Muhammad was forced to flee Kabul for Bukhara. He returned in 1840 and assisted in a rebellion against the British led by the Kohistanis (the very people of north of Kabul who a year before had revolted against him to facilitate the return of Shah Shuja!). Although this rebellion had some success, Dost Muhammad saw his own position as hopeless and surrendered to the British at the end of the year.

The British invasion of Afghanistan was rooted in the belief that political legitimacy was the domain of an exclusive elite and therefore the replacement of one Durrani leader in Kabul by another would not provoke much of a reaction.

[13]Christine Noelle, *State and Tribe in 19th century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan (1826–1863)* (London, 1997).

Indeed what was most striking was how quickly the vast majority of the Durrani elite and their allies such as the Qizilbash fell into line in support of Shah Shuja's restoration. The collapse of elite resistance and their co-optation by the British was probably instrumental in bringing about Dost Muhammad's surrender. He could not conceive of popular rebellions as anything more than nuisances to a foe who was overwhelmingly superior in arms and had a seemingly endless supply of money. After all he had put down rebellions by these same groups himself with only a fraction of the resources now available to the British. And the British had used their initial advantages with skill. The advance of their army into Afghanistan and the defeat of all forces that opposed them proved their military might. Their political agents moved swiftly to buy the support of prominent Durrani notables in the south and Ghilzai leaders in the east while subsidizing the clergy. When Shah Shuja proved both personally unpopular and inept, the British took control of the government themselves in order to make administrative reforms that would increase state power. In the event it was these reforms and the unanticipated consequences of their own occupation that would change the nature of the Afghan polity to make their position less rather than more secure in the short run.

The most important of these changes was to reduce the power of the Durrani notables by centralizing the military. Horse cavalry units formerly supplied by regional chiefs were replaced by those under the direct command of the central government. Since it was the supply of such military units and the tax revenues granted to maintain them that had given the Durrani elite much of their power, the abolition of the system greatly weakened their influence in government. Another blow to the system of feudal-like relations within the Afghan state was the sudden influx of vast sums of money into the economy. Money introduced into any subsistence-based economy is always disruptive because it creates new sets of winners and losers. The British flooded Afghanistan with silver rupees and letters of credit drawing on the Indian banking system to pay for their occupation, salaries for troops, the administration of the country, and to provide subsidies to influential leaders. This cost was partially offset by reforms in the state revenue collection system. In a single year the British claimed to have increased tax receipts from 225,000 to 900,000 rupees through restructuring the old system. The sale of tax farming rights to international fruit merchants also facilitated a much wider state penetration into the local economy than previously.[14]

The well-known story of the destruction of Britain's Kabul expeditionary force has overshadowed these internal changes and historians have long argued over what caused this famous defeat.[15] According to most nationalist Afghan

[14]Malcolm Yapp, "The Revolutions of 1841–42 in Afghanistan," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 27 (1964): 333–381. Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, *Inter-regional Trade and Colonial State Formation in 19th Century Afghanistan* (Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Michigan, 2001): 58.

[15]see Christine Noelle, *State and Tribe in 19th Century Afghanistan* (London, 1997), 53–55 for a good comparison of these views).

historians, reaction to the British occupation produced an inevitable and universal anti-foreign, pro-Islamic, popular rebellion whose success was never in doubt. British accounts have tended to see the various uprisings as uncoordinated, prompted by policy blunders and exacerbated by incompetent leadership. In particular, they see the attempts to cut dramatically the subsidies paid to the eastern Ghilzai Pashtun chieftains and the clergy as an important factor that alienated these two powerful groups who then took the lead in fomenting opposition to the British. Increasing the efficiency of the tax collection system fell heavily on the non-tribally organized villagers who had been resisting such actions even before the British arrived. From the standpoint of changing concepts of legitimacy the most significant aspect of the revolts against the British in the winter of 1841–42 was that they came from the margins and not the center. It was a Kohistani revolt that induced the British to abandon Kabul and it was the eastern Ghilzais who massacred the retreating army. The Durrani elite joined in late and had little control over the fighters involved. Shah Shuja felt safe enough to remain in Kabul as king after the British withdrawal in January 1842. His political position actually improved over the next few months, until he was assassinated in April. In 1843 Dost Muhammad was invited to return from India and resumed his reign as Amir of Afghanistan until his death in 1863.

Dost Muhammad's second reign took place in a new political and economic environment. As Yapp has pointed out, the British had created a stronger state governmental framework and Dost Muhammad retained their changes in his own administration. They had also reduced the political power of the tribal chiefs and proven the superiority of a disciplined and well-trained army, a type of army that Dost Muhammad sought to build for himself.[16] Whereas in the fourteen years of his first reign (1826–39) he was barely able to control the region between Kabul and Kandahar, by the end of the twenty years of his second reign he had retaken control of almost all of today's Afghanistan. During this process he increased his revenue base from 2.5 million to 7 million rupees by the end of his reign. He also renewed ties with the British in two treaties that granted him a total of 2.6 million rupees to help defend Herat in 1856 and for not aiding the Indian Mutiny of 1857.[17] The interaction with the British had thus ended up strengthening the Durrani state and the elite that ran it but at the same time changed the nature of the relationship between the population and the central government. This would become apparent at the end of the Second Anglo-Afghan War in 1880 with the emergence of Amir Abdur Rahman.

The Changing Nature of Military Power in the Nineteenth Century

Through the beginning of the nineteenth century the rulers of Afghanistan had measured their strength in terms of horse cavalry. Expensive to maintain but

[16]Yapp, "The Revolutions of 1841–42 in Afghanistan," 381.
[17]Hanifi, *Inter-regional Trade*, 261; Noelle, *State and Tribe*, 250.

overwhelmingly superior in battle, it was control of these forces that made warfare the exclusive domain of elite groups. The categories of landed estates given to support these troops and their leaders consumed a major portion of a state's potential revenue. By contrast, the mobilization either of tribal mountaineers or rural peasants was militarily secondary. These auxiliaries could rarely turn the tide of war because they often had little or no experience in organized warfare and fought on foot armed only with shields, long knives and spears. They were no match for the professional cavalry troops. While such groups often constituted the core of rebellions against the Mughal or Safavid rule, the best they could hope for was to keep these empires out of marginal regions that were unprofitable to occupy in any event.

The First Anglo-Afghan War therefore marked a military watershed: irregular forces that had previously played only marginal roles in the region's history had defeated the British. Whole sections of the Afghan population that had previously been excluded from politics had fought against the British in a national cause even if they had not conceived of it as such. One reason they were able to do this was a changing technology and economics of warfare in south Asia that made such a revolt far more dangerous that those in the past. Gunpowder weapons such as cannons had been introduced into south Asia during the seventeenth century but, because they were expensive and needed professionals to man them, they strengthened only the hands of existing states. By the beginning of the nineteenth century changes in the military strength of the people inhabiting marginal regions increased with the introduction of cheap muskets, and later, rifles. This allowed a wider (and more effective) participation in warfare by larger numbers of people.

The mountaineers now came to war with their own gunpowder arms and could fight effectively at a distance, particularly in ambush. As Rudyard Kipling observed in an oft quoted line from "Arithmetic of the Frontier":

> A scrimmage in a Border station—
> A canter down a dark defile—
> Two thousand pounds of education
> Drops to a ten-rupee *jezail*.[18]

Such tactics, of course, do not win battles but are hallmarks of a classic guerilla war where the aim is to make it too costly for the invader to continue his occupation. The British had been driven from Afghanistan by the losses suffered at the hands of such irregulars, not because they lost pitched battles with regular armies. As if to prove this point, the British returned to Afghanistan in the summer of 1842, destroying the covered bazaar in Kabul and laying waste to the countryside in revenge for their earlier defeat before returning to India.

[18] A *jezail* was a locally produced Afghan musket. Rudyard Kipling, *The Works of Rudyard Kipling* (Roslyn, NY, n.d.)

Postwar Reconsiderations and Recalculations

The political consequences of the First Anglo-Afghan War were profound, but the lessons that the British, the Durrani elite, and the Afghan people drew from it were quite different. As far as the British were concerned, the war proved that the Durrani elite was incapable of controlling its own people. Hence an occupation of the country as a colony, even with the cooperation of its ruling class, would likely prove unsuccessful or demand a military commitment far out of proportion to the value of the country. This strengthened those who favored a more indirect approach, in which British India would control Afghanistan's external affairs without actually occupying it through the support of compliant Durrani amirs. Since the Durrani amirs had always gotten along better with the British than their people did, establishing cordial relations with them by means of subsidies and military aid was certainly the easier objective to achieve. This policy proved remarkably fruitful in part because it never demanded that the amirs act to help Britain overtly, only that they remain passive. Major Durrani "inactions" over the next century (all unpopular with their own people) included refusing to participate in the Indian Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, accepting the establishment of the Durand Line in 1893 that divided the region's Pashtun population, remaining neutral in both the First and Second World Wars, and refusing to actively assist the struggle for Indian independence.

The Durrani rulers drew a different set of lessons from the First Anglo-Afghan War. The first was that it was rebellions by Afghanistan's own population and not their own actions, government policies, or paid troops that had preserved Afghanistan's independence. This meant that unless they created a stronger state structure and more centralized military, they too could fall victim to the very same types of uprisings that had driven the British from the country. The second lesson was a corollary of the first: the Durrani dynasty needed to redefine its own political legitimacy in the eyes of its own people in a way that would command more popular support. To achieve the first objective successive amirs solicited British aid to build a stronger state by arguing that only they could prevent a supposedly rebellious Afghan people from constituting a serious frontier problem for India and stand as a barrier to Russian expansion. The brilliance of this policy was that the amirs received payments to keep themselves in power while keeping the British out of the country. This helped in achieving their second objective of building internal political support by portraying themselves to the Afghan people as the necessary preservers of the nation's independence and Islamic religious identity against potential aggression by both the British *Raj* and Czarist Russia.

For the Afghan people, the First Anglo-Afghan War was a demonstration of a new political power. This was the first time non-elite Afghan groups had taken a decisive role in national politics and proven their ability to remove a government.

However, because they were still culturally hobbled by traditional concepts of legitimacy, neither the Ghilzais nor the Kohistanis attempted to replace the old Durrani elite or even force it into a power sharing relationship. Instead they continued to see themselves as mere allies of existing Sadozai or Muhammadzai Durrani factions whose members they often appointed to be the titular leaders of their struggle. The clergy who framed their opposition to the British in terms of a religious *jihad* and not a national struggle reinforced this attitude. Therefore almost all of the popular resistance was aimed specifically at the infidel British and only obliquely at their Afghan collaborators, including even Shah Shuja. Thus the future Durrani rulers would valorize the legitimacy of popular revolts against outsiders in religious and national terms while simultaneously condemning as treasonous and illegitimate any revolts against their own governments. All these lessons were put more clearly into play during the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–80) and its aftermath.

Second Anglo-Afghan War and Amir Abdur Rahman

After the death of Amir Dost Muhammad in 1863 Afghanistan entered a period of turmoil during which various Muhammadzais fought one another for power, although Dost's heir, Sher Ali, remained the nominal ruler in Kabul. This was also a period that saw rapid Russian expansion into Central Asia up to the historic borders of Afghanistan. When the Russians sent envoys to Afghanistan in 1878 the British decided they needed to play a more direct role in Afghan affairs. They therefore demanded the right to station their own envoys in Kabul, which Sher Ali refused. The British responded by issuing an ultimatum in November and then invaded, occupying Jalalabad and Kandahar. Sher Ali fled Kabul and sought Russian aid, which was refused. He died a few months later and his son, Yaqub, became the new amir. Yaqub was forced to sign the "Treaty of Gandamak" with the British in May 1879 that ceded various border territories and permitted a permanent British mission in Afghanistan in return for subsidies. When the British representative in Kabul was murdered in September, they moved in force to occupy the capital from their base in Kandahar. Yaqub abdicated in October and sought exile in India, leaving the British in effective charge of Afghanistan.

The imposition of direct foreign rule provoked revolts by the Ghilzai Pashtuns and Kohistani Tajiks who together attacked Kabul during the winter. As a better-organized and better-led army, the British successfully held off the besiegers who withdrew to Ghazni in the spring. But in July 1880 an Afghan force led by another of Sher Ali's sons, Ayub Khan, inflicted a major defeat on the British at the Battle of Maiwand near Kandahar. Withdrawing from Kabul the British expeditionary force moved south rapidly to defeat this Afghan army in September. At this point, however, London decided that the effort needed to subdue Afghanistan and rule it directly yet again was not worth the price.

As after the First Anglo-Afghan War, the British recognized that their own occupation of Afghanistan in support of Yaqub's weak regime had destabilized the country. They therefore sought out a new cooperative ruler who, in exchange for large subsidies and the right to rule an unoccupied Afghanistan, would agree to let Britain control the country's foreign affairs and respect British interests in India. They found such a man in the person of Amir Abdur Rahman (r. 1880–1901), one of the many grandsons of Dost Muhammad who had long been at odds with his uncle Sher Ali and his sons. Abdur Rahman's only significant Durrani rival at that time was Ayub, the ruler of Herat who, as the victor at the Battle of Maiwand and Sher Ali's son, had a stronger claim to the throne than Abdur Rahman and better nationalist credentials. But British support in arms and money gave Abdur Rahman the practical advantage in becoming amir and Ayub was defeated and forced into exile in India.[19]

Even more than Dost Muhammad, Abdur Rahman looked upon the tribal rebellions that had led to the British withdrawal as a greater danger to him than they were to the British. Had the rebellious Tajiks or Ghilzais that attacked Kabul had leaders with more vision, or more ambition, they could have seized power for themselves when the British left. In the event they appear to have been satisfied with withdrawal of the British and once again left national politics to the Durranis. Abdur Rahman made sure they would not have the chance to change their minds. Over the course of the next twenty years he would crush every autonomous group in Afghanistan one by one, aided by British subsidies that financed the creation of a powerful national army equipped with modern weapons that were purchased abroad or produced in his own factories. His campaigns began in the early 1880s when he took control over a number of eastern Pashtun districts and tribes that had gained some autonomy during the war. He then fought a major war against the Ghilzai who had revolted against his rule (1886–88). In 1888 he regained direct control over Afghan Turkestan from his rebellious cousin Ishak Khan, who had served as his governor there. Abdur Rahman's last major campaigns were wars of conquest against areas where the Kabul government had never before had effective control: the Hazarajat in central Afghanistan (1891–93) and Kafiristan in eastern Afghanistan (1895–96).[20]

These wars accomplished two things: they made Amir Abdur Rahman paramount and they centralized political and economic power in Kabul. Previously, major provinces such as Kandahar, Herat, and Turkestan had been almost independent from Kabul because they had rich sources of revenue that could finance local armies. And because the relatives of the amir in Kabul usually administered them, they also became major sources of dynastic tension when the governors used them to create independent power bases, often by allying themselves with

[19]Brian Robson, *The Road to Kabul: the Second Afghan War,* 1878–1881 (Staplehurst, UK, 2003); T. A. Heathcote, *The Afghan Wars,* 1839–1919. (London, 1980).

[20]Hasan Kakar, *Afghanistan: A Study in Internal Political Developments, 1880–1896* (Kabul, 1971).

regional non-Muhammadzai political elites against the central government in Kabul. Abdur Rahman destroyed this autonomy by sub-dividing provinces into smaller units and by appointing new governors who were personally loyal to him rather than immediate relatives.

The other notable aspect of these campaigns was how often they were directed at whole populations and not just the political elite. Large numbers of defeated Ghilzais were uprooted and exiled to northern Afghanistan. The Shia Hazaras suffered terribly in a war notable for its violence and the enslavement of a large part of the population that was moved to Kabul. It was becoming less and less possible to remain neutral in political struggles. This inability to avoid state power extended into the economy as well. Direct taxation was imposed on tribes that had previously been taxed only indirectly, if at all. Abdur Rahman also targeted the income from the complex system of trade and money transfers that integrated Afghanistan in a broader network that included central Asia and north India. While previous Afghan governments had taxed trade running through their territories, they had not attempted to control the organization of the trade itself or its financial infrastructure. By contrast, as Hanifi has shown, Abdur Rahman attempted to monopolize both in a way that eventually isolated and impoverished the Afghan people.[21]

Creating a Pashtun state

From 1881 until 1888 Abdur Rahman directed most of his campaigns against the Pashtuns, particularly the Ghilzai. Yet for the next 90 years, the Pashtuns as a whole would see themselves, and be seen by others, as the privileged ethnic group in the country. For if the Pashtuns were the prime victims of Abdur Rahman's early wars they were the beneficiaries of his later ones. For example, his suppression of the Ghilzai revolt coincided with his recovery of Afghan Turkestan in 1888. This allowed the amir to punish large numbers of rebellious Pashtuns from the south by exiling them to Turkestan, a territory then inhabited primarily by Uzbeks and Tajiks. The deported Pashtuns were given rich agricultural lands and access to pastures for sheep-raising in a territory that had been depopulated by wars among the former Uzbek amirs, slave raiding by the Turkmen nomads, and disease. Because these lands were generally much better than those they had lost and because they were surrounded by other hostile ethnic groups, the former Pashtun rebels of the south became strong supporters of the government in the north.[22] Similarly the war against the Hazaras employed large numbers of Pashtun tribesmen who were given Hazara land and rights to sell captives in

[21]Hanifi, *Inter-regional Trade.*

[22]Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton, 1978), 419; Nancy Tapper, "Abd al-Rahman's North-west Frontier: The Pashtun Colonisation of Afghan Turkistan," in *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan, ed. Richard Tapper* (London: 1983) 233–261; Hasan Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Abd al-Rahman Khan* (Austin, 1979).

exchange for their participation. These Hazara conquests were particularly valuable to the Pashtun nomads who were able to extend their summer range deep into the Hindu Kush, but also gave other neighboring sedentary Pashtun groups control over lands formerly owned by the Hazaras.[23] The 1895–96 campaign to conquer and convert the inhabitants of Kafiristan to Islam also benefited the Pashtuns of the Kunar Valley who had long been in conflict with them.[24]

In the eyes of most non-Pashtuns at least the Afghan government was now viewed as a Pashtun government and not just a Durrani dynasty. This would pay a dividend for the Muhammadzais two decades later when Abdur Rahman's grandson, Amanullah, failed in his attempts at modernization and sparked a revolt that brought his reign to an end in 1928. Amanullah had launched the Third Anglo-Afghan War at the beginning of his reign in 1919 to win complete independence from Britain, which had been promised to Afghanistan in return for the country's neutrality in the First World War. This ended the regular subsidies provided by the British and forced Amanullah to collect more taxes internally and reduce his military expenses. It was these taxes as much as his social reforms that provoked a revolt among the Ghilzais, which his government could not put down. They were joined by the Tajiks of Kohistan who took Kabul upon Amanullah's abdication. Unlike their nineteenth century predecessors, the Kohistanis did not accept a substitute Muhammadzai royal to replace Amanullah, but instead placed one of their own, a bandit named Habibullah, on the throne. Although he ruled only for nine months the Tajik pretender proved hard to dislodge and defended Kabul quite vigorously. Nadir Khan, Amanullah's former war minister who was descended from a collateral branch of the Muhammadzai line, finally displaced him in 1929. Nadir had raised an army of eastern Pashtuns from both sides of the Durand Line to support him in part by portraying the Tajik ruler of Afghanistan as a usurper who had no right to rule over Pashtuns. That the Ghilzais would rally around the idea of preserving Pashtun privilege by restoring another Muhammadzai leader to power, rather than attempting to seize power themselves, shows how effective Abdur Rahman had been in his policies of co-optation.[25] The Ghilzais (who historically were more often to be found in revolt against Durrani monarchs than supporting them) gave the Muhammadzais another fifty years of life for their dynasty before it was finally displaced—by Ghilzai communists.

The Soviet Invasion, Defeat, and its Aftermath

In 1978, Mohammed Daud Khan, the last Muhammadzai ruler (who had deposed his cousin, Zahir Shah, and declared himself President of an Afghan republic

[23]Klaus Ferdinand, "Nomadic Expansion and Commerce in Central Afghanistan, a Sketch of Some Modern Trends." *Folk* 4 (1962) 123–160.

[24]Hasan Kakar, *Afghanistan: A Study in Internal Political Developments, 1880–1896* (Kabul, 1971), 181–210.

[25]Leon B. Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919–1929* (Ithaca, 1973).

in 1973), was murdered in a coup that brought the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to power. The PDPA had two factions, the Parcham (Banner) whose members were predominantly Persian speakers drawn from the civil bureaucracy and the Khalq (Masses) whose members were predominantly eastern Pashtun from the military. Unlike their royal predecessors this new elite represented a sharp break with the past Muhammadzai governments, but was still dominated by Pashtuns. In a statistical comparison of the leadership of old and new regimes Rubin drew the following conclusions:

> The ethnic composition of the old regime was remarkably similar to that of the court circles originally recruited by Amir Abdur Rahman. The most salient characteristic of that elite was that it included more than ten times the concentration of Muhammadzais and Kabulis than the population as a whole. Other Pashtuns were also overrepresented, and the overrepresentation of Pashtuns and Muhammadzais was greater among the core power holders than it was in the elite as a whole. Tajiks (mostly Kabulis) were also quite predominant, but mainly in the legal, financial, and social ministries; Pashtuns held the core of power ... Parcham and especially Khalq resembled the old regime in being dominated by Pashtuns. Non-Pashtuns, however, played an important role in the cadres of Parcham, and many of the "Pashtuns" were urbanized and Persian speaking.[26]

The more radical Khalqis quickly became the dominant faction in PDPA government and they were not just interested in ruling Afghanistan but in transforming the country through revolutionary policies of land reform, education, and changes in family law. They moved to destroy all who opposed them, including many of their Parchami rivals, the traditional rural landowners, the old military establishment, and Islamic clergy. They abandoned Afghanistan's historic policy of neutrality for a direct alliance with the Soviet Union. The regime also rejected the country's traditional Islamic symbols of legitimacy by striking religious salutations from their speeches and decrees and changing the color of the flag to red. As revolutionaries they justified themselves and the legitimacy of their government in Marxist terms. This rhetoric was alien to most of the rural population, except in the north where it was all too familiar to the descendants of refugees who had originally fled from Soviet Central Asia in Stalin's time.

When the PDPA went beyond policy pronouncements and attempted to implement its policies in the countryside they met with resistance. The Kabul government responded with military force and the country's provinces erupted in rebellion. These uprisings were uncoordinated and tended to focus on local rather than national issues, but they soon became widespread. The Soviet Union, which distrusted the Khalqi leadership and had attempted to remove it,

[26]Barnett R Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven 1995), 90, 92.

became concerned that the situation was getting so out of control that the regime itself was in danger of collapse. In an attempt to restore stability the Soviet Union invaded at the end of 1979, deposed the ruling Khalq faction after murdering its leader, Hafizullah Amin, and installing a Parchami, Babrak Karmal, as his replacement. The Soviets then engaged in a wholesale war against the Afghan population in an attempt to force it into submission or run the resistance out of the country. Eventually three million Afghans fled to Pakistan and Iran, over one million were killed, and millions of others were displaced internally. In spite of having no centralized command, divided by ethnic and sectarian differences, and hopelessly outmatched in equipment by Soviet and Afghan government forces, a war of resistance—financed with billions of dollars in aid and training obtained from the United States and Saudi Arabia and administered by Pakistan—wore down the Soviets and in 1989 they withdrew. Their regime in Kabul collapsed three years later.[27]

Even more than in the nineteenth century Anglo-Afghan wars, the Soviet invasion created a national opposition unlike any seen before. The collapse of central authority and the rise of locally based resistance groups transferred real power into the hands of local communities previously ruled by distant officials assigned by the central government. By framing the conflict as a *jihad*, a holy war, it was possible to unite a very large number of people and to deprive the Kabul government of legitimacy. As during the British occupation, the Afghan resistance was unable to win set-piece battles against its Soviet enemy because of their better organization, firepower, and air superiority. However the Russians found it impossible to permanently suppress the opposition in spite of inflicting heavy casualties. Of course, since the Afghan definition of victory consisted of a Soviet withdrawal, all the resistance needed to do was to make the country ungovernable and a drain on Soviet resources. With the acquisition of American supplied stinger anti-aircraft missiles in 1986, the rebels were able to reduce a key Soviet advantage and drive the price for staying even higher. By the late 1980s losses in men and material were enough to make the war profoundly unpopular in Moscow. As London had decided a century before, the Soviets under Gorbachev also concluded that the best policy was just to let the Afghans keep their country and bring the troops home.

In other respects, however, the defeat of the Soviets in the twentieth century was quite different from the Anglo-Afghan wars of the nineteenth century. In the Anglo-Afghan wars, the occupations had been relatively short and the damage to Afghanistan's economy and people were not severe. The Soviet occupation by contrast lasted a decade and did immense damage to the country and its people. More significantly, both sides in the anti-Soviet war were to a large extent creations of their funders rather than mass indigenous political movements. The PDPA received its support from the Soviet Union, a cost estimated at about 5 billion dollars a year during the occupation period. The *mujahidin* would not

[27]Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, NC, 1985)

have been competitive without access to similarly large sums of money and arms, which were supplied by the United States and Saudi Arabia. This meant that the Afghan resistance was as dependent on international aid as its Soviet supported rival was. As a result, the Afghan *mujahidin* found themselves sucked into two larger conflicts: the ongoing Cold War struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union, and a new struggle by Saudi Wahabis to make the war in Afghanistan the vanguard of a transnational *jihad* that they hoped would bring about Islamic revolutions in the Sunni Arab world and beyond. Unfortunately for their patrons, the Afghans had little interest in either struggle. In particular the only *jihad* the Afghans were willing to fight was in Afghanistan itself and that would end when the Soviets withdrew.

The interference of outsiders was clear in the organization of the resistance. While there was a broad coalition of Afghan parties opposed to the Soviet invasion, including royalists, nationalists and regional groups and even non-PDPA leftists, only the Islamist parties had access to money and arms. This was because foreign aid to the resistance was distributed through the Pakistan government and only the seven Sunni Islamist parties it formally recognized were eligible for support. (The Shia parties received aid from Iran's Islamic government.) These parties had not been particularly influential inside Afghanistan before the Soviet invasion. Indeed many of their leaders had been living in exile in Pakistan because of their participation in a series of failed Islamic uprisings against the Daud government in the mid-1970s that had received little or no popular support. By making them conduits of aid Pakistan raised their profile and power. Local resistance groups within Afghanistan had to affiliate with one of these Islamist parties in order to get weapons. Because the groups fighting in Afghanistan had little or no interest in the political ideologies of these parties or their leaders, party affiliation was most often based on personal relationships or regional and ethnic ties. Thus in choosing between the two most powerful parties, the Tajiks and northerners in general tended to align them themselves with Rabbani's *Jamiat-i-Islami* while Pashtuns and others in the south and east joined more often with Hekmatyar's *Hizb-i-Islami*. But given the complex nature of Afghan politics, local rival groups would often join different *mujahidin* parties regardless of ethnic ties or would defect from one party to another if they could get a better deal.

Because outsiders financed the war, they naturally interpreted the struggle in Afghanistan as a Manichean conflict of competing ideologies (e.g., Islam versus atheism, socialism versus capitalism, freedom versus oppression, feudal reactionaries versus progressive patriots, modernists versus traditionalists). The lack of ideology that underlay traditional Afghan politics was thereby hidden. The *mujahidin* parties, for example, had good connections with Kabul government bureaucrats throughout the war and could generally get any information they needed from them. PDPA troops struck deals with local resistance groups to avoid fighting. Even at the national level the philosophical differences between the resistance and the Kabul regime that had originally sparked the war were

soon blurred. The PDPA government itself denounced its earlier radical policies as mistakes after the Soviet invasion. They rid themselves of the Soviet style red flag, pointedly reintroduced Islamic phrases into their decree and speeches, and made sure their leaders were seen at prayer with supportive clergy. But as in the nineteenth century Anglo-Afghan wars, the continuing opposition to the legitimacy of PDPA government was not based on its policies but because it allowed the occupation of the country by Soviet troops who remained actively at war with the population.

When the Soviet Union withdrew in 1989 this bedrock objection to the PDPA's legitimacy was removed but so also was the protection of their troops. At the time it was assumed (even by the Russians themselves) that the Kabul regime would fall within weeks or months. However, its leader, Najibullah (who had replaced Karmal in 1986), proved surprisingly successful at keeping his troops intact and holding the regime together. This support was based not on ideology but on Najibullah's continuing access to Soviet money, weapons and food that he could distribute to his followers. This included a large growth in the regime's rural militias to more than 100,000 people. Many former *mujahidin* groups defected in return for arms and money. They saw little reason to fight against his regime if their own needs were met and the Soviets were gone. Najibullah even reorganized his administration by opening it up to non-communists and proposed reserving positions for *mujahidin* leaders in a future coalition government.[28]

Pakistan and the United States, both of which wanted to see an outright *mujahidin* military victory, rejected Najibullah's overture. But, although they had expected to topple the PDPA government easily when the Russians withdrew, the *mujahidin* proved unable to take fixed military positions, and that failure produced a stalemate. With the Soviets gone, far fewer Afghans were willing to take up arms against the government as long it did not trouble them. It was only when the Soviet Union disintegrated and Russia refused to continue large-scale aid that Najibullah's government collapsed in April 1992. Although it was still well armed, had its forces intact, and had enough stored supplies to survive in the short term, factions within the PDPA decided that their long-term prospects were bad. Now was the opportune moment to negotiate their futures from a position of strength and they all cut deals and switched sides largely on the basis of ethnic ties. Thus the PDPA regime was less defeated militarily than reorganized as it components defected to various *mujahidin* factions.

The end came in March–April 1992 when Abdul Rashid Dostam, the commander of a much-feared Uzbek militia guarding a key approach to Kabul, defected from the PDPA and allied himself with the most renowned resistance commander of the war, Ahmad Shah Masud. As Tajik commander of the Panjshir Valley north of Kabul and attached to Rabbani's *Jamiat-i-Islami*, his troops had surrounded much of the capital and already controlled much of northeastern

[28] Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978–1992* (London, 2000).

Afghanistan. Another *Jamiat* commander, Ishmail Khan, was dominant in the Herat in the west. Together they formed the "Council of the North." Thus, when Dostam defected, the whole northern part of the country and its vital road connection to Central Asia left government control with the result that, without Dostam's troops and heavy weapons, Kabul was defenseless. The Communist regime quickly ceded Kabul and its military firepower to Dostam and Masud's troops. The Khalqis joined with Hekmatyar's *Hisb-i-Islami* troops, who had earlier attempted to move on Kabul on their own. Najibullah then sought asylum from the United Nations and disappeared from view until his brutal death at the hands of the Taliban in 1996.

With the fall of the Kabul regime the last remaining thread that had bound the *mujahidin* into a marriage of convenience snapped. Their leaders had no clear goals because their unity had been based on resistance against the Soviet Union and its client Afghan government, not on any common political platform. Perhaps more important, none of the seven recognized faction party leaders who were supposed to form a new government had done any significant fighting inside Afghanistan themselves or created a national political base. They were naturally opposed to any open system of government that might expose their unpopularity or narrow base of support. They were particularly vehement in their insistence that the former king, Zahir Shah, should play no role in government, not even a symbolic one. Royal legitimacy through recognized tribal lineage still held enough sway among ordinary Afghans that it threatened to undermine the Pakistani-backed *mujahidin* party leaders because the most powerful of them (Rabbani, Hekmatyar, and Sayyaf) lacked prestigious social origins.

A *mujahidin* power struggle was therefore inevitable once the PDPA dissolved. Each faction leader realized that if he did not obtain power now, he never would. And since the parties were based more on personality than ideology there was very little basis for compromise, particularly since the rise of a predominant leader would mean an end to all the smaller factions. Thus the agreed-upon distribution of power failed almost immediately. The "Prime Minister," Hekmatyar, refused to enter the capital and remained encamped on the hills south of Kabul from where he shelled the city and the troops of his "President," Rabbani. Kabul, which had been spared any fighting during the war because of its many lines of defenses, was devastated over the next three years and large parts of the city were reduced to rubble. As a result, many of its residents fled the city seeking safety elsewhere and 25,000 people were believed to have died as a result of the fighting. A stalemate ensued in which neither side was able to dislodge the other. In an attempt to break the deadlock, Hekmatyar cut a deal in January 1994 with the Uzbek leader Dostam, who once again betrayed former allies to join what he hoped would be the winning side. This was an odd couple: the most fundamentalist *mujahidin* commander embracing the former communist general. The venture failed to bring down Rabbani's government and the fighting around in and around Kabul intensified as the Tajiks led by

Masud in one part of the city continued to fight bitter battles with the Hazaras led by Ali Mazari in another.[29]

The inability of the factions to find any common agreement about what a future government should look like, let alone who should run it, made it impossible to unify the country politically. And because each of the factions was strong only in its home region and could not displace its rivals elsewhere, there was no real prospect of unifying the country militarily. Nor did any of the factions have the same access to resources that they did during the anti-Soviet war for coalition building. The swift end of Najibullah's regime after the Soviet Union collapsed demonstrated dramatically how dependent he was on outside funding to stay in power. Less well noticed was that the victorious *mujahidin* parties soon faced the same problem. The United States, which had been matching Soviet aid to Kabul with its own support to the *mujahidin* (negative symmetry), was only interested in funding a Cold War struggle that had suddenly been rendered moot. Saudi Arabia was generous in funding a *jihad* against unbelieving invaders but showed little interest the civil war that was now raging among fellow Muslims. The international community that might have stepped in to help with rebuilding the country instead focused on the more the immediate problem of relieving the suffering caused by faction fighting in the country.

Afghanistan's most effective strategy of entangling invaders in wars that could not be won, by making the land ungovernable, had thus begun to haunt the Afghans themselves. Having proved so successful at producing a "graveyard of empires" during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Afghans appeared to have dug one for themselves. No faction was able to establish either political legitimacy or military hegemony, but none was willing to compromise with its rivals either. It was as if the country had developed an autoimmune disorder: powerful antibodies fatal to foreigners were now directed at the Afghan body politic itself.

The Rise and Demise of the Taliban

In previous periods of turmoil Afghan leaders had arisen to reestablish political order in the country by combining some recognized claim of political legitimacy with substantial aid from the outside world. Because Afghanistan had been a rentier state whose successive central governments (regardless of ideology) had all been dependent on extracting outside resources to maintain their stability for close to two centuries, attempting to create a new central government without substantial outside aid would have been a daunting task under the best of circumstances.[30] In their absence it proved impossible.

[29]Thomas Barfield, "The Afghan Morass," *Current History* 95 (1996): 38–43.

[30]Barnett Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State* (New Haven, 1995).

Afghanistan's potential leaders had only weak claims to national power and little access to substantial outside resources. With the end of the Cold War the great powers of the world had lost all interest in Afghanistan. Russia had closed the book on the Soviet Union's misadventures there and was content to let the Afghans live as they pleased. The United States, although it had promised to help the Afghans rebuild, was now unwilling to become involved in settling disputes there and withdrew its aid and personnel from the region. This included not only Afghanistan but neighboring Pakistan as well, which was now denied assistance because its (previously overlooked) nuclear program was found to violate legal restrictions laid down by Congress. The United Nations continued to provide emergency help but had no mandate to bring about a political solution and no means to do so if it did. Of the neighboring states, only Pakistan retained a keen interest in Afghan affairs because it had always expected that its control of the *mujahidin* parties would enable it to install a future client regime in Kabul. Pakistan's means to this end was to support the reemergence of Pashtun hegemony in Afghanistan.

Pashtuns had dominated the Afghan state since the founding of the Durrani Empire in 1747. Although this ignored periods of earlier Afghan history when the Pashtuns had little role in government, it did accurately reflect the ethnic hierarchy that had been imposed on the country by Amir Abdur Rahman at the end of the nineteenth century. This version of Afghan history portrayed the Pashtuns as a "martial race" who were the natural rulers of the country. The Persian-speaking Tajiks might be necessary for running the government bureaucracy but it was believed they were no match for the Pashtuns in a fight, political or military. The Turkish-speaking minorities could be safely ignored and the Shia Hazaras were objects of overt discrimination. But this historical reading proved faulty. The years of warfare first against the Soviets and then among the Afghan factions themselves had changed the ethnic balance of power and restored autonomy to the non-Pashtun regions. The belief that the Pashtuns constituted the most powerful military force had also been shattered. The Tajiks under Ahmad Shah Masud had produced the most efficient and effective fighting force against the Soviets. The Uzbeks under the leadership of Dostam had created a feared militia that dominated northwestern Afghanistan. Even the Hazaras had become armed and dangerous, recovering lands and autonomy in central Afghanistan they had lost a century earlier.

In spite of these changes Pakistan remained a vocal supporter of the restoration of Pashtun hegemony as a means to extend its own influence into Afghanistan. To this end it had long supported Hekmatyar's predominantly Pashtun *Hizb-i-Islami* at the expense of other factions. It looked like this goal might be achievable when Hekmatyar's Islamists joined forces with the PDPA Khalq faction in April 1992. The one thing they could both agree upon was that any successor government should be dominated by Pashtuns. But in spite of Pakistani aid (overt and covert), Hekmatyar proved unable to take Kabul militarily or expand his influence beyond the territories in which Pashtuns were a majority. And while

Hekmatyar's faction fought to achieve Pashtun hegemony at the national level, he did not provide any cohesive government at the local level.

The Taliban Movement

So it was when the Taliban, a puritanical Islamic group consisting almost exclusively of Pashtuns, arose in Kandahar in 1994, Pakistan switched its backing to the new movement with the hope that it would have more success that its previous clients. The Taliban had arisen in response to the anarchic conditions around Kandahar where the region's population was being victimized by local warlords who were little better than bandit chiefs. After taking control of Kandahar the Taliban expanded quickly with Pakistani aid and destroyed Hekmatyar's *Hizb-i-Islami* to become the dominant Pashtun faction in 1995. A year later they seized Kabul and by 1998 all but northeastern Afghanistan was under their control. While the Taliban were initially lauded for bringing peace and security to the regions they captured, their social and religious policies were widely unpopular. In some ways they were a mirror image of the PDPA, intent on imposing radical doctrines of foreign origin (this time religious) on a population that was strongly opposed to them.

The rise of the Taliban did mark a sharp break with Afghan political tradition in one respect. The Taliban was the first government in Afghanistan to be run exclusively by clerics. As a religious movement they could argue that they did not represent any ethnic, political, or regional group. Indeed one of the reasons for their success among Pashtuns was that as religious leaders they stood outside the tribal system. Commenting on the structurally similar Bedouin tribes in the thirteenth century, ibn Khaldun argued that religion was uniquely suited to bringing tribes together because,

> the Bedouins are the least willing of nations to subordinate themselves to each other, as they are rude, proud, ambitious and eager to be leaders. Their individual aspirations rarely coincide. But when there is religion (among them) through prophethood or sainthood, then they have some restraining influence on themselves. The qualities of haughtiness and jealousy leave them. It is, then, easy for them to subordinate themselves and unite (as a social organization).[31]

Had the Taliban attempted to lay stress on national unity through religion they might well have had greater success since presumably ethnicity or regional origin would be no bar to enter the movement. However, the Taliban remained almost exclusively Pashtun, its religious ideology a crude mixture of Salafi Islam and *Pashtunwali*, the cultural code of the Pashtuns. The movement was hostile to

[31]ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 120.

Sufism and the veneration of saints, elements that were deeply embedded in the popular Islam of Afghanistan. Nor did the Taliban ever manage to convince other ethnic groups that they were anything other than Pashtuns bent on restoring their political hegemony throughout Afghanistan. Murders of Hazaras in Mazar in 1998 reinforced this view, as did the lack of participation by other ethnic groups in the movement. More debilitating was the Taliban's increasing reliance on Pakistani troops, recruits from Pakistani madrasas, and international "Arab" brigades in what was, from the Afghan point of view, a civil war. In absence of an external enemy the Taliban found it difficult to gain legitimacy internally when so many Afghans viewed it as a puppet regime dominated by Pakistan and al Qaeda Arabs.[32]

Externally the Taliban were isolated by the world community for harboring of terrorists and their dependence on revenue from the international drug trade. Their policies on women alienated western public opinion and their version of Islam was roundly condemned by most other Muslim nations. Because outside aid has been critical to the success of all regimes in Afghanistan, the failure of the Taliban to generate such aid put the regime at risk of collapse. As a result they became even more dependent on financial and political support from Pakistan and Osama bin Laden. This was to prove their undoing following the September 11th attacks on the United States. Pakistan immediately deserted them and their alliance with al Qaeda made them a direct target of the United States.

At the beginning of the war Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, did play the "graveyard of empires" card, threatening the United States with the same fate as the Russians and British if they dared to enter Afghanistan. The Western press ran many stories of "unconquerable Afghanistan" and the invincibility of Afghan guerillas. However, within weeks of war's beginning, Taliban positions unraveled completely. They first collapsed in the north and west where Pashtun control had always been most resented. Kabul fell immediately after the Taliban abandoned the city, hoping to regroup in the Pashtun heartland. But this proved no sanctuary when the traditional Pashtun tribal leaders used the opportunity to regain power and expel the Taliban from Kandahar. Although Mullah Omar is still at large, there is no evidence that he still has a movement to lead in Afghanistan. Far from rising up against the infidels and demanding the foreign troops leave, the Afghan population was now asking for a larger international force to prevent the return of the warlords and provide basic security for the country's reconstruction.

One reason that United States forces failed to draw the same level of resentment that Soviet troops had received was because the Taliban had already

[32]Ahmad Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, 2001); Larry Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle, 2001); Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars* (New York, 2004).

introduced foreign forces into the county: those of the so-called Afghan Arabs and Pakistanis. These groups were widely resented in Afghanistan, particularly in the northern part of the country and in Kabul, so it was not hard for the United States to build a coalition against them. Using one foreign invader to rid the country of another fell well within the Afghan political tradition. And the Americans could be counted upon to leave the country at some point, while it was widely feared that Pakistanis and Arabs would not; so in this case using a non-Muslim power to rid the country of unwelcome foreign Muslims was deemed acceptable. Of course leaders of the factions that lost the war are ready and eager to invoke the old shibboleths against foreigners on Afghan soil. They have had the most impact among the eastern Pashtuns who border Pakistan and who have a long history of opposing state control of any type. The question of whether they will be able to mobilize a significant opposition beyond this base, however, depends mostly upon how effective the new government is at restoring security and rebuilding the economy.

Rebuilding Afghanistan: Bonn and Beyond

Have we returned full circle to Afghanistan as the "highway of conquest," easy to conquer and easy to hold? This is unlikely to be true. Rather, receiving the international community with open arms reflects widespread rejection by Afghanistan's people of failed political leaders and movements that helped destroy the country over the past twenty-five years. Determined to shape the country to their ideological wills, the policies of the PDPA brought discredit to radical socialism just as those of the Taliban did to radical Islam in much of the country. And after ten years of civil war led by power hungry faction leaders, any intervention that promised to truly end the country's cycle of destruction and prevent Afghanistan's neighbors from continuing to stir up trouble there was welcome. But even more attractive were the promises of large-scale international aid and the installation of a pragmatic government whose focus would be on restoring the country to a level of normalcy. All see the usefulness of a central government, if only as a potential re-distributor of money and other aid from an outside world which demands that countries have central governments. To return to Thomas Hobbes again, effective rulers, even bad ones, are superior to anarchy. To supply such stability is to create legitimacy, not of the best sort perhaps, but a type of legitimacy that is a prerequisite where the state structure has been wrecked. Beginning at this point focuses less on process and more on how legitimacy itself comes to be created and why it takes root.

Afghanistan now presents an opportunity to observe such a process because in spite of its many problems the current political leadership of the country has proved remarkably pragmatic. The Bonn Accord and the subsequent *Loi Jirga*s in 2002 and 2003 laid the foundation for a government that incorporated all major ethnic and regional groups. In this process, choosing cooperation rather

than conflict was not a vote for idealism; rather, the decision was forged by necessity: in nearly a quarter century no faction ever proved capable of dominating the whole country on its own militarily, even with outside help. This experienced reality means that the chances of actually creating a broad-based government are much better than they were in 1992 when the Soviet backed Najibullah regime collapsed and each faction struggled for supremacy. There are also a number of additional reasons why current factions have become more interested in creating a national government that is more open than previous ones:

1. Because there was no existing state structure to seize in Afghanistan, the occupation of Kabul alone did not give a decisive advantage to the groups occupying it. Negotiations have centered on recreating a national state, not controlling the assets or political strength of an existing one.
2. Each group now controls its own region so firmly at the local level that any new central government needs their cooperation in order to function.
3. The pre-1978 ethnic hierarchy that gave Pashtuns an almost monopolistic control of the Afghan state has been destroyed. During the anti-Soviet war and subsequent civil war each of the subordinate ethnic groups became armed and militarized. The Pashtuns themselves have begun to realize they cannot restore the *status quo ante* even if they want to and so must negotiate.
4. No faction has proposed either a division of the country along ethnic lines into ever-tinier parts (á la the former Yugoslavia) or threatened to join with co-ethnics in neighboring states to create some "Greater Tajikistan/Uzbekistan/Turkmenistan/Pashtunistan" even though ethnic and regional cleavages have become sharper over the past ten years. None of the neighboring states have pressed territorial claims on Afghanistan either.
5. Afghan factions have all understood that the resources of the international community can only be effectively tapped if there is a national government to deal with the outside world, even if only to cash the checks and redistribute the money.
6. Even in regions where the so-called warlords remain powerful, all have sought to portray themselves as cooperative with the emerging national government and none has sought to bring about the downfall of the central government.

Perhaps the biggest opportunity that reconstructing an Afghan government provides is a chance to look at Afghanistan afresh. While there will be many innovations they will likely be cloaked as a "return to Afghan tradition" in order to avoid immediate dispute and conflict even when they constitute sharp breaks with the past. Although the new Afghan constitution calls for a highly centralized government with a strong president, the reality is that the country's regions have

increased their autonomy to such a degree that the central government must consult them. The continuing power of regional commanders such as Ishmail Khan in Herat or Dostam in Mazar is currently seen as a major problem, but from a historical perspective it also represents a fresh change: the rise of regional elites who see their futures in their home regions. The Afghan state established by Abdur Rahman vested all power in Kabul and appointed all provincial officials. The provinces were stripped of their most talented people, who sought out careers in Kabul, and development in the country was very uneven. Today by contrast none of the regional leaders accepted invitations to join Karzai's national government in Kabul (with the exception of the Panjshiris who were already adjacent to the capital) because they see better prospects in their own home regions.

If in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Afghan rulers cut off their country from the world because they feared domination and exploitation by foreigners, it is clear that at the beginning of the twenty-first century internal problems are seen as the greater threat. Most of the Afghan population wants closer ties, economically, politically, and militarily, with the wider world to protect themselves from the ills of domestic anarchy and abusive leaders. Concern now is not over how long the international community might stay, but that it might leave too soon. The process of creating a government structure through negotiation and processes such as the national *Loi Jirga* have not made everyone happy. However, these processes do explicitly recognize that politics in Afghanistan can no longer be restricted to a tiny elite in Kabul or to a single ethnic group. For example, although the Panjshiris who led the Northern Alliance currently hold a disproportionate number of powerful ministries in Karzai's national government, they are not likely to become a new dominant elite. The institutions they occupy in Kabul are mere shells and their political base is quite weak even among their fellow Tajiks, who would have little compunction about allying with other ethnic groups against them. The current political process in Afghanistan, messy and uncertain as it is now, represents the culmination and transformation of a national process, begun in the early nineteenth century, that first brought ever larger numbers of people into the political arena but then excluded them from any meaningful role in their own government. This time even larger numbers of people have been empowered militarily and now refuse to leave the political realm to others.

Some Conclusions on War as Dispute Resolution

What broader conclusions about war can be drawn from the Afghan case? If nothing else, the Afghan experience supports the broader point that war was much more effective as a tool of domination in the pre-modern period, in spite of the relative inferiority in numbers of troops and military technology, because it was fought among discrete groups with loose connections to the

subjects they ruled.[33] War really did settle political issues definitively. The number of troops needed after a conquest were relatively few because they were not expected to have to put down continual internal revolts, but to defend the new conquest from rival outsiders.

By contrast, the nineteenth century Afghan wars were the first in a series of popular wars in which military victories could not bring stability or legitimacy. War proved ineffective as a means of establishing legitimate client regimes that would not need constant military support. To move beyond this point required a much greater commitment to a much more extensive process: military conquest needed to be followed up by the introduction of a new political ideology or economic structure that would win the population over, a dynamic more characteristic of wars of religion than wars of conquest. Alternatively, after incorporating territory new rulers might seek to engage in population transfers to remove opposition (the infamous "ethnic cleansing" in former Yugoslavia) or to facilitate immigration of political allies to the new area (China's policy of ethnic Han settlement in Xinjiang or Tibet). In these situations, winning battles or wars becomes only the first stage in a much more complicated political process with no guarantees of ultimate success (viz. the French in Algeria, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States in Iraq).

It is no wonder then that war as the royal road to power and glory for premodern rulers no longer seems as inviting to modern states despite their technical superiority in making war. It is also helps explain why so many of Afghanistan's powerful military commanders seem to be so keen on taking part in the new political process rather than subverting it. By transforming themselves from warlords into regional politicians they have recognized that armed conflict in such weak states as Afghanistan is now the royal road to anarchy and ruin in which it is only a matter of time before they themselves fall victim. Now that an alternative presents itself, they wish to retain and expand their power but understand that they are playing a game now that has different rules and rewards. But as Afghan history reveals, the country's relation to the outside world has always been a critical factor in its political and economic development even when it has appeared most isolated. Whether a new form of popular sovereignty can replace the old tradition of competing elites based on military power depends as much on the outside world as it does on the Afghans.

[33]The closest analogy of this pre-modern process is found today during hostile takeovers by multi-national corporations. As factory workers and paper pushers continue their usual patterns of work, rival teams of mercenary lawyers waving proxy votes engage in furious battle to gain control of the target corporation's assets. Upon victory the winning side purges losing corporate board members and executives, and installs its own. Nothing changes on the factory floor during this process, and workers ordinarily are not expected to take part in the struggle or ratify its outcome despite the fact that they have as much or more to lose or gain from the new owners' policies than other players.