Afghanistan

Political frailty and external interference

Dr Nabi Misdaq

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Nabi Misdaq has a rare blend of skills. As an anthropologist he studied contemporary Afghan society and then worked for many years as a journalist with the BBC's Overseas Service in which capacity he met and interviewed most of Afghanistan's leading politicians. Combining these skills with a profound knowledge of Afghan history, he has produced an enthralling study which reveals the fundamental problems encountered by generations of Afghan rulers in attempting to create a legitimate, centralised Afghan state, problems which, as Misdaq also shows, still confront Afghanistan's present-day leadership.

Ralph Grillo, Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology,
University of Sussex

Dr Nabi Misdaq has described in this book how the Afghans defended their identity and country, Afghanistan, in odd conditions throughout history, with a special focus on the last 300 years. The publication of this book, considering the current conditions Afghanistan, is by itself an example of such defense. This is a thoroughly researched and compassionately argued work. I will recommend this book as a must for all those who have an interest in the geo-politics of Afghanistan.

Dr Farouq Azam, former Afghan Minister of Education

Afghanistan: Political Frailty and External Interference is a timely book. At a time when the focus of the world is on the region, it is one of the few anthropological commentaries by a well-known native. Nabi Misdaq's book is detailed and insightful. He has established himself as an authority on Afghanistan. I strongly recommend the book.

Dr Akbar S. Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies
American University, Washington, DC

Afghanistan

Afghanistan provides a discourse on two and a half centuries of Afghan socio-political disquiet, outside interference and the resilience of the Afghans.

This book explains the clashes, reconciliations and bargaining between the central government and the tribes. The tribes are the corner stone of the present state and therefore it is not surprising to see a continuous struggle between the tribes in preserving their autonomy and the state that wants to usurp it. The author also investigates the effects of foreign invasions over the past two and a half centuries, in order to highlight the unique nature of the Soviet, and most recently, American invasions. *Afghanistan* also includes a discussion of a 'post-America' Afghanistan that will probably see many years of revenge and hostile ethnic tensions due to external interference. The issues covered include:

- Afghan history
- The role of Islam
- Contemporary theories of state
- Nationalism
- Ethnicity
- Tribalism

This book is essential reading for those with research interests in Afghanistan, Middle East Politics and History, as well as for the general reader wishing to learn more about this strategically located country.

Dr Nabi Misdaq, who came to England from Afghanistan on an academic scholarship, graduated from LSE before taking Masters and PhD degrees at the University of Sussex. The Soviet invasion took him from academia to the BBC, where he worked for almost two decades as a radio journalist, producer and as head of the Pashto section of the World Service, which he established in 1982. Since 2001 he has been residing in the USA where he taught Pashto at George Mason University, before beginning work on a major forthcoming Pashto–English dictionary as well as other language resources, in response to the dearth of reference materials available in the quintessential language of Afghanistan.

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To all those who have given their precious lives for the unity, freedom and independence of Afghanistan.

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Preface

Writing a socio-political history of Afghanistan with the view of explaining the consequences of the Soviet invasion, in the context of Afghan history and politics, has been in my mind since the Red Army's march into Afghanistan in December 1979. Now that Afghanistan is over-run by yet another superpower, the United States of America, the publishing of a well documented and researched book is even more urgent. So when I decided on the shape and the context of the book, I was fortunate to have had more sources at my disposal than I could cram into such a book. Not knowingly, I have been collecting material to such an end for over twenty years.

In 1976 I undertook fieldwork in Afghanistan for a Sussex University DPhil thesis in Anthropology under the supervision of Dr Brian Street. That research was based in a Pashtun district of Zazi, out of nearly 260 such districts in the country. I was then working on the Timber Merchants of Zazi and how timber, as a cash item was important for their gradual relocation from their rural area to Kabul over the last one hundred years. My write-up of that thesis was at an advanced stage when the Soviet Red Army invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 and I decided to halt my study and to make myself useful to my people by working for the BBC, in my new capacity as a radio-journalist. I knew that Afghans would not tolerate the Soviet invasion and it would be a matter of two to four years before they would withdraw. I was right about the resistance the Afghan people mounted that forced the Soviets to retreat, but wrong on the timescale. If I could have gauged correctly how Afghanistan might have become a global geopolitical issue and how because of it the invasion would last for a decade and lead to further complications amongst ethnic and resistance groups, I probably would have continued with my studies.

Since leaving the BBC in 1996 I decided to return to university with the view of completing that thesis. However, because of the scope and shape of the thesis looking into the consequences of the Soviet invasion and related issues, I was unable to use or include my data on the Zazi. Also the war against the Soviets, the communists and amongst the resistance parties has totally changed factors on the ground. The forests were burnt

by the Russians to deprive the resistance from taking shelter in the Zazi mountains; the climate has become dryer and much hotter; the people of Zazi have been scattered not just in Pakistan, India and Iran but to all parts of the world; the Zazi countryside is infested with mines and very few people have returned to an uncertain future. Under these circumstances it was not easy to bring the material up to date. Neither did I feel enthusiastic about writing a PhD from a frozen picture, though it could be the basis for a book in the future.

During my years at the BBC, I collected agency reports, BBC talks and commentaries, radio monitoring reports, newspaper cuttings and interviews that I had conducted myself with key figures, on an almost daily basis. There are also historic, political and anthropological books and manuscripts that were at my disposal. It was with such abundance of multi-sited material that I undertook to write a new thesis. The methodology of that thesis was therefore based on the evaluation of such sources and my own experience of living through it. It therefore has turned into an archival reflexive research, enriched with my own reading of events. The method I devised was a simple one. I would try to use different sources to tell the story and then analyse and comment on facts presented in order to clarify the issue at hand. This had worked well for me whether I was tackling physical environment or theoretical issues on nation, nationalism, ethnicity and so on.

I visited Afghanistan on numerous occasions during the Soviet occupation (1979–89) and the Mujahideen chaotic infighting years (1992–96) and had the opportunity twice to go back during the Taleban years (1996–2001). My previous visits were to report for the BBC about the on-going events amidst the war and the gathering of material for programmes to be broadcast later on. My two visits to Afghanistan took place in July–September 1997 and September 2000. During these last two visits I met with the Taleban leadership at all levels from their leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar, to cabinet ministers, commanders and their supporters in most parts of the country.

Afghanistan is an ongoing and developing story. I stopped my research in about June 2001 while the Taleban were still in power in Kabul. In October of that year the US attacked Afghanistan in retaliation for September 11, New York trade towers and Pentagon building in Washington. After thirty-four days of carpet bombing Taleban positions around Kabul and in the north, the Taleban withdrew from the capital and more than 8,000 of their troops laid down their arms and gave themselves up to Uzbek, Tajik and Hazarah warlords. But it was Kabul, the capital city that was important and who should control it. As I document in the Epilogue to this book, despite President George Bush's request that the Northern Alliance not enter Kabul, the followers of Ahmad Shah Masoud and his Shura-i-Nezar, from amongst the Northern Alliance, marched into Kabul and the killing of their opponents and stealing of private property started

once again. It was a replay of the years 1992–96 when these groups committed major human rights violations.

Elsewhere, the US Special Forces and CIA agents recruited former warlords by giving them hundreds of millions of dollars in cash to help them capture or eliminate Taleban and al Qaeda leaders. Thus, once again the chaotic years of April 1992–September 1996 were repeated, when Mujahideen bands played havoc by killing, raping and stealing and the warlords and their militias were 'ruling' supreme in areas under their 'control' and not paying much attention to what the American installed government of Mr Hamed Karzai may say or ask them in Kabul. Three years on the American forces are guided by warlords and their militias, who were one by one defeated by the Taleban since October 1994. The Taleban being predominantly Pashtuns are considered to have represented or to have had the consent of the Pashtun majority and are now considered 'enemies' by the Americans who have killed over ten thousand of them in their homes, villages, at wedding parties and while holding *jirga* (local assemblies), as is their tradition to settle internal disputes and wrangles. In fact all Pashtuns never were Taleban and all Taleban never were al-Qaeda. While the followers and supporters of the present warlords poured on Kabul and the provinces to help and work with them, not a single Pashtun intellectual or former technocrat went to join the Taleban government when they were in power. Pashtuns, like others, had reservations about the Taleban system of government and their foreign policy. Yet the American military in three years of its presence so far (July 2004) in Afghanistan have not understood this simple fact. They are busy creating enemies from the Pashtuns for themselves instead of treating them as major players in Afghan war and politics over the centuries.

The delay in publication of this book also coincided with the US occupation of Afghanistan and the overthrow of the Taleban. In order to bring the work up to date, I have added an Epilogue at the end in which I discuss the occupation of Afghanistan, by the only one remaining superpower in today's world. Two key books have come out since '9/11', events in New York and Washington: Bob Woodward's *Bush at War* and Richard Clarke's *Against All Enemies*. Woodward is an editor of the Washington Post and interviewed Bush for three hours and Clarke was America's National Security and Counterterrorism expert both under Clinton and under George W. Bush till March 2004. Woodward also interviewed people in the Pentagon, the US National Security and other US military establishments. Both are insiders and so I have liberally quoted them in the Epilogue.

There are numerous Mujahideen to whom I owe thanks for looking after me, in all my visits during the Soviet Red Army Occupation and taking care of me while bullets were sometimes whizzing above our heads. Special thanks to the late Mullah Yar Mohammad who rescued me in Kandahar in 2000, to Hamid Karzai's father, the late Abdul Ahad Karzai, a

former deputy speaker, who lent me and my colleague, Rahimullah Yosufzai, a pickup in Quetta, with a driver so that we could interview the Taleban and Dr Farooq Azam for inside information about the *Jihad* years. I am also grateful for the help and guidance of Professor Ralph Grillo who meticulously supervised my research, one result of that is the publication of this book. I am also more than thankful to Dr Michael Johnson who went through some of this material and made valuable suggestions and comments. I want also to thank my son Omar J. Misdaq for proofreading the final parts of the manuscript with a fine-toothed comb. I thank my wife Arian and my younger son Yusuf J. Misdaq for being patient with me, becoming a student once again. Also, special thanks are due to Clare Rogers, the Anthropology Secretary at the Department of Anthropology at Sussex University who always made sure I had access to rooms, computers and resources.

In this book, a prominent part is inevitably played by Afghans of Pashtun origin who form the majority of the country's population. As a Pashtun myself, I clearly have my own biases, but I have tried as best I can to set aside my own predisposition, and to approach the discussion in this work, more in sorrow and compassion than in anger, using a wealth of evidence at hand. It will be left to the reader to judge whether or not I have succeeded.

Acknowledgements

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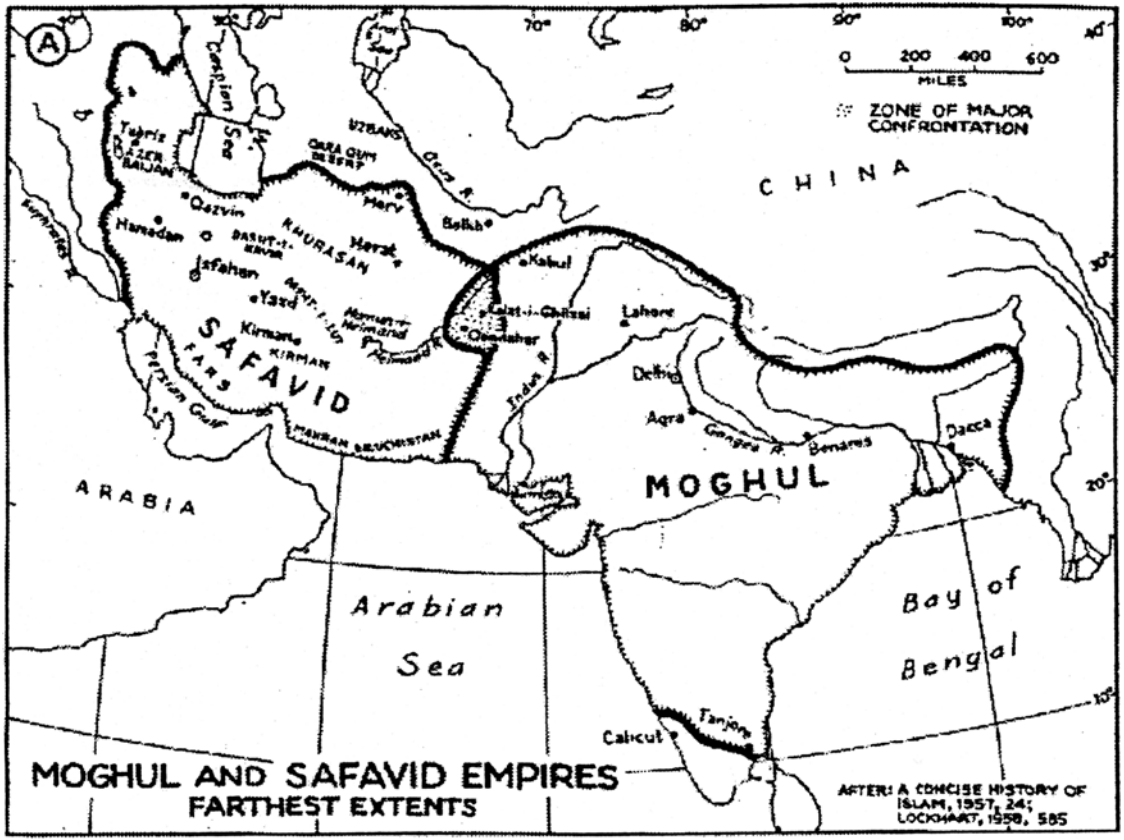
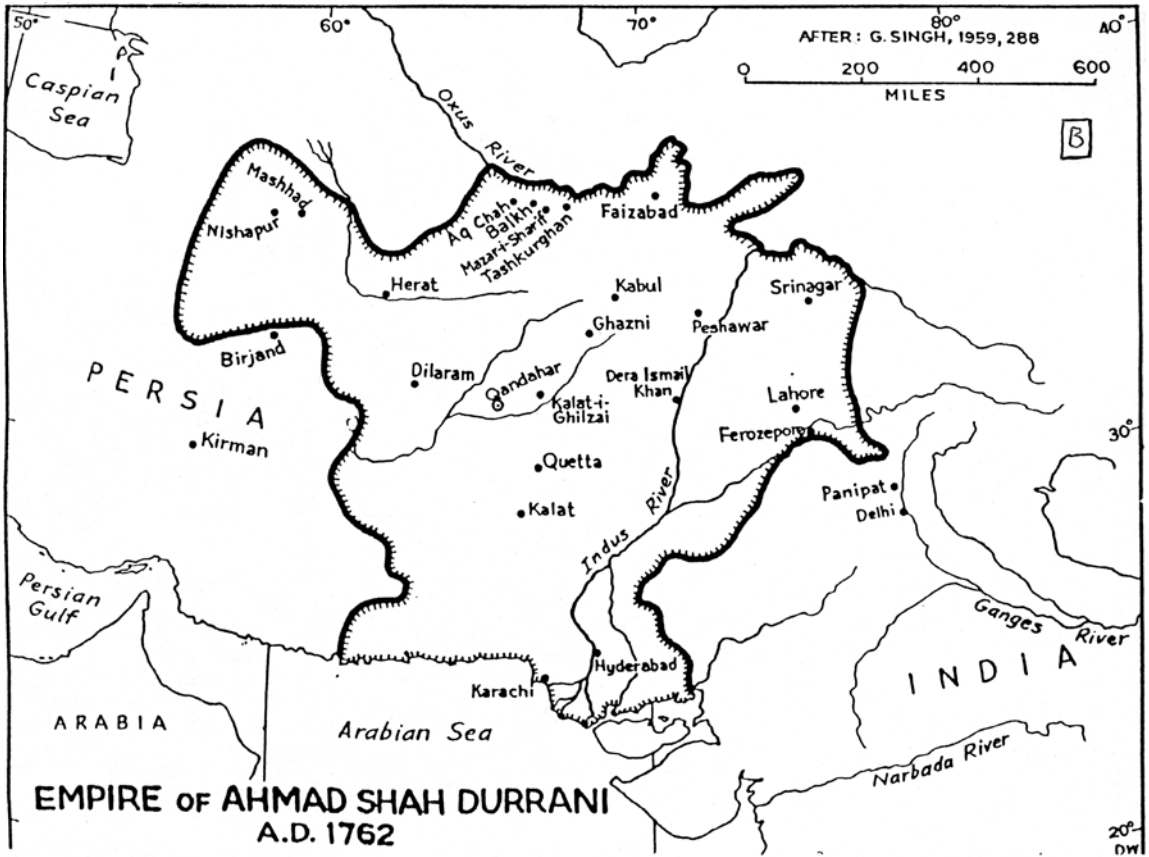
Acronyms

AGSA	*De Afghanistan de Gato de Satelo Adarah*, Office Guarding Afghanistan's Interests
AIC	Afghan Information Service
Amir	Islamic ruler
APC	Armoured Personnel Carrier
CC	Central Committee
CPI	Communist Party of India
DRA	Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
DWOA	Democratic Women's Organisation of Afghanistan
DYOA	Democratic Youth Organisation of Afghanistan
FBIS	Federal Bureau of Information Service (USA)
FSB	Security Bureau of Russian Federation (Successor to the KGB)
GHQ	General Head Quarters
GRU	Intelligence Directorate (of Soviet General Staff)
HEI	Revolutionary Islamic Movement
HHDC	Homeland High Defence Council
HI	Harakate Islami
HI	*Hezb-i-Islami Hekmatyar*
HI	*Hezb-i-Islami Khales*
HW	*Hezb-i-Wahdat*
IIA	Itehade Islami Afghanistan
ISI	Interservice Intelligence Service (Pakistan)
JI	Jamiat Islami
KAM	*Kargari Atla'ti Mo'sesah* Workers Information Institute
KGB	Committee for State Security of Soviet Union
KhAD	*Khedamate Etla'te Dawlati* State Secret Police
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NFF	National Fatherland Front
NIFA	National Islamic Front of Afghanistan
NLF	National Liberation Front
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
PDPA	Peoples Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
SAM	Surface to Air Missiles

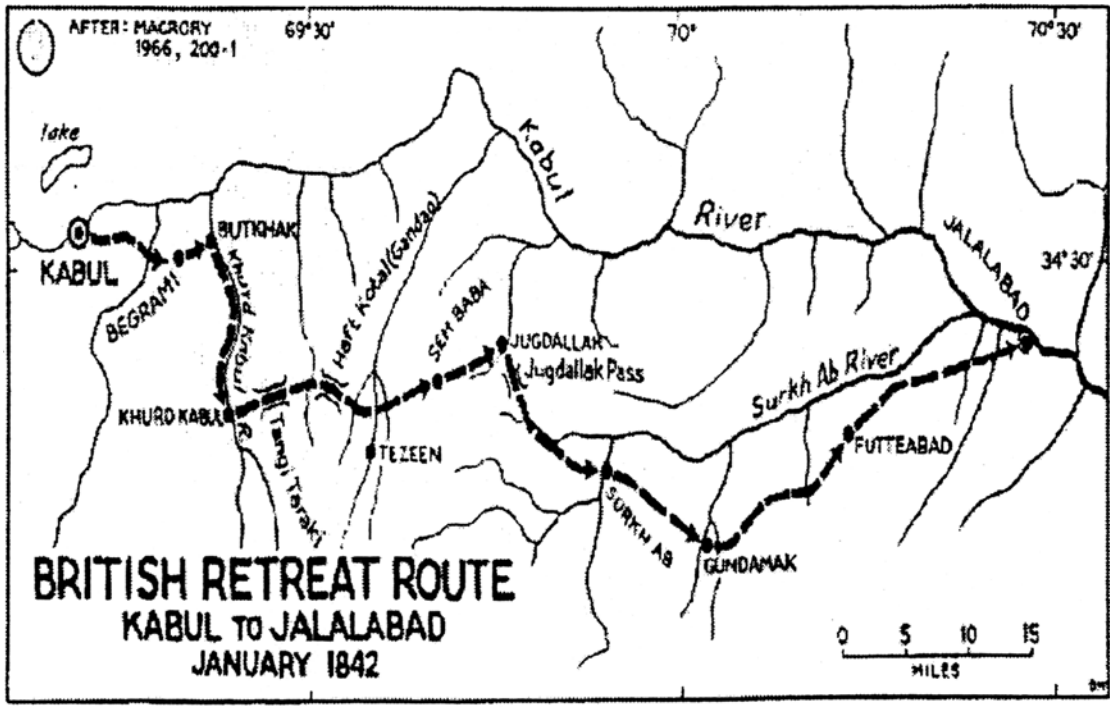
SAVAK	The Shah of Iran's Secret Police
SWB	Summary of World Broadcast (BBC)
Umma	The Community of the Believers
WAD	*Wezarate Etla'ate Dawlati* Ministry of State Intelligence
WAKFA	Wak Foundation for Afghanistan



Map 1 Moghul and Safavid empires: farthest extents.

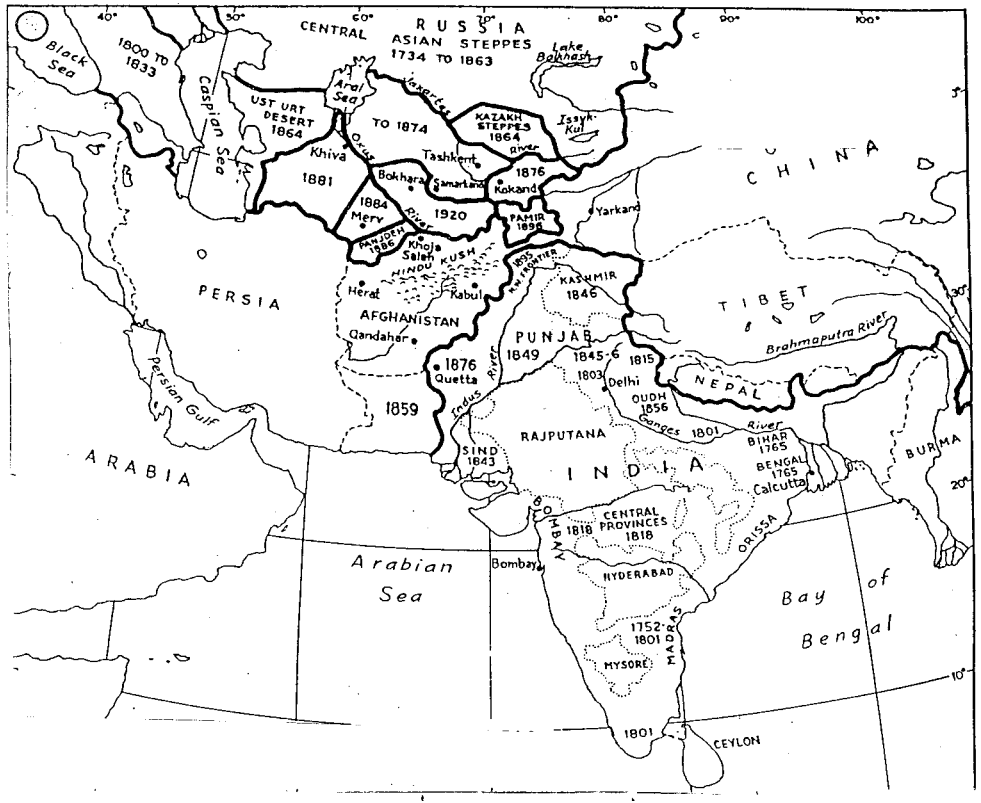


Map 2 The empire of Ahmad Shah Durrani at the end of his reign.



Map 3 The British retreat route from Kabal to Jalalabad, January 1842.

Map 4 Afghanistan and its six neighbours.



Map 5 Two centuries of southward advance by Imperial Russia and westward of Imperial British India, coming to a halt on the Afghan borders.

Introduction

Aims and objectives

Afghanistan has been in the limelight since the Soviet invasion in December 1979 when it became a geopolitical issue in the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the USA. Both superpowers fought their proxy war at costly expense to the Afghans. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union (1991), the US abandoned Afghanistan. Neighbouring powers like Iran and Pakistan, who had their own axes to grind, stepped in to fill the vacuum by supporting their favourite warlords. The ten-year war and national uprising against the Soviet and local communist forces thus turned into an on-going twelve-year civil war fought on ethnic, linguistic and religious grounds. After the rise of the Taleban in 1994, other regional powers, such as the Russian Federation and the newly independent countries of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, also joined in. India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Western intelligence followed them, aiding the opposition warlords against the Taleban with arms, international publicity, food and medicine.

My contribution in this book to the general knowledge and understanding of these events is to draw on existing historical and scientific writings for my story line and to illuminate, add and complement this work through my research on tribe, ethnicity, nationalism, state and Islam. I also draw on my personal experience of following Afghan events closely in the last quarter of a century, by working and heading the Pashto Section of the BBC World Service. During this time I collected, almost on a daily basis, published materials such as news agencies reports, radio monitoring reports, BBC despatches and commentaries, newspaper cuttings and my own interviews with influential Afghan and non-Afghan experts on the war and its consequences. At first I was interested in working entirely from my collection of material. I soon realised that I would not be doing justice to political events since the overthrow of the monarchy in 1973, if I did not go back in history, at least to the founding of the present Afghan state in the middle of the eighteenth century, to assess if what has happened since is unique or whether there are examples and precedents in recent history

for such occurrences. The approach in this book has, therefore, inevitably become a multi-disciplinary one, reviewing existing published material on history, politics and in the social sciences, and complementing them with recent research, theories and my own comments and analysis of these events and their root causes.

The scope of the book

Afghanistan has been described by historians of the region as the 'crossroads' of Asia. Many empires from Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC to Genghis Khan (thirteenth century), Timur-e-Lang, the Limping Timur or Tamerlane (fourteenth century), the Moghuls (sixteenth/seventeenth century), the Persians (seventeenth/eighteenth century) and the British (nineteenth/twentieth century), the Soviets in the 1980s and lastly the Americans in the beginning of the twenty-first century have traversed the length and breadth of the land, leaving their mark on the country and its population. A lasting sign of some of these, especially earlier invading forces is the people they left behind, which is the main reason for the heterogeneity of Afghanistan's population with their ethnic links across international borders. Looking over two and a half centuries of Afghan history, the heterogeneity of the people has been both the strength and weakness of the Afghan state. The state and its apparatus have always been potentially important for power. In Afghanistan, however, the political, tribal or ethnic composition of the groups, once they capture the prestigious seat of government, find difficulty in handling it. The state apparatus (with the exception of nine months in 1929) has been in the hands of different Pashtun dynasties since its foundation in 1747. Though from 1978–92 the state fell to the communists, three out of four of their leaders were also Pashtuns. In April 1992 it was first captured by the heterogeneous Mujahideen resistance groups, and in September 1996 by the Pashtun Ghilzai dominated Taleban, who took control of the capital, Kabul, and of over 90 per cent of the rest of the war-stricken country.

This book also provides the ground for a discussion of the long-term factors characteristic of Afghan history. These are terrain, environment, tribe, state, religion, language and the perennial weakness of the state, and the balance that is kept between the centre and the periphery. As to this last point, the two and a half centuries of Afghan history under discussion shows that whenever the equilibrium between centre and periphery is lost, the state intrudes on the tribe and vice versa. Such a state of flux shows that Afghanistan, more than most developing states, has often found it extremely difficult to come to grips with the forces of change and modernisation. Stubborn resistance to such forces has toppled monarchs and successive regimes. In nearly all the historical, sociological and anthropological works to date on Afghanistan, only passing references are

made to change and modernity. And yet, looking at the root causes of uprisings and rebellions, I find that the conservative Afghan tribal and ethnic leadership has again and again rebelled and protested because of their disapproval of what they see as challenges to their customs, norms and traditions.

The book is in three parts. Part I: The Afghan state and its people 1747–1978. In this long period from the formation of the state to the takeover by the communists, the state expanded under its founder, Ahmad Shah Durrani, and since his death the borders contracted until just before the turn of the twentieth century. There were four dynastic changes, the first the founding Sadozai, the second in 1826 from the Sadozai to the Popalzai, followed by two further ones (1880 and 1929) all within branches of the same Durrani confederacy. The discussion in Part I is concerned with the long historical period and political processes, which have a bearing on events since the 1980s.

Part II: Political turmoil and Soviet invasion, 1973–79. This is the period of rapid social and political change and upheavals. In 1973 an influential member of the royal family toppled the 226-year-old monarchy and declared a republic. In 1978 the communists in turn overthrew the republic and its founder. Soon the whole country rose against the communists and they had to bring in the Soviet Red Army, with the result that 1.5 million Afghans of all ages, mostly Pashtuns, were killed, some five million made refugees, with twice that number becoming internally displaced. After nearly ten years of war and devastation, the Red Army failed to subdue the Afghans and left, leaving behind a surrogate communist government and upwards of ten million mines, dotted on footpaths, roads, farms and inside empty houses.

Part III: Ethnicity and power politics, 1975 to date. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the communist government in Kabul was left 'high and dry' and fell in April 1992. Its leader, Dr Najibullah, was stopped by his own Uzbek militia at the airport, telling him 'you started the fire and now want to go leaving us to burn', and was prevented from joining his family in Delhi and forced to take shelter in the UN building in Kabul. His government handed over power to a hurriedly put together exile government that was formed from the leaders of the Mujahideen in Pakistan. After the Mujahideen president's first two months in office, a civil war of the most atrocious kind ensued in a struggle for power between resistance groups. After five years of the almost total devastation of Kabul City and the killing of over 60,000 of its citizens, and the forcing out of nearly one million more refugees, the Taleban came on the scene. They eliminated warlord after warlord, took Kabul in 1996 and the rest of over 90 per cent of the country in less than four years.

The period 1747 to the late mid-twentieth century shows how Afghanistan, time and again, went to the brink of disintegration and then was saved. This was a period of internal strife and civil war, with different

parts of the country being ruled by different petty rulers and warlords, some belonging to the same ethnic and tribal configuration, others to different ones. The points that emerge are the weakness of the state, its propensity to factionalism (including ethnic factionalism), its susceptibility to external forces and the difficulty of modernisation.

From the time of the inception of the Afghan state, unlike many other countries in the region such as Iran, China and India that have been controlled from their respective strong centres, the centre in Afghanistan has always been weak or ineffective. That is why the centre has always lived in the shadow of the tribe at its periphery. The tribe precedes the state in that it was the tribes who set up the state. While the tribe's territory and boundary were fixed and known to its members, the state and its borders always shifted, expanding in the first quarter of a century after 1747 then remaining constant for the next quarter century and finally contracting until 1893. Since then the borders of the state have remained fixed and internationally recognised.

Another feature of the Afghan state is that, despite being in the shadow of the tribe, it has been a modernising force. But in order to attain the consent of the tribe, *amirs* and kings had councils of tribal representatives who were consulted on all state matters. This tradition in one form or another continued till the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman (1880–1901), who, in order to raise a modern army and establish civil servants and a judiciary, embarked on large-scale centralisation and modernisation. 'The reforms carried out by Abdur Rahman were not based on any reformist ideology. His conception of modernisation was purely pragmatic' (Roy 1986: 15).

Externally, the two imperial forces of Tsarist Russia and imperial Britain, competing with one another, stood on the borders of Afghanistan, one from the north and the other from east (see Map 5). This 'great game' was played at the expense of the people they overran, with only the Afghans in the region playing their 'game' as a tactic of survival and independence, skilfully and determinedly striving to keep their country intact, though losing land to both empires.

After the first civil war ended in 1826 and a loose central authority was established under Dost Muhammad, Amir Abdur Rahman, the 'Iron Amir', spent sixteen of the twenty-one years of his reign (1880–1901) fighting rebel forces in different parts of the country (see Table 2.1). Only then was he able to bind all parts of the state to his central authority. He created the modern system of taxation, the army, intelligence and the police. The uprisings in the periods 1801–26, 1880s/1890s and 1929 bear striking similarities to those of the warlords of the 1990s, continuing over the turn of the century and the rise of the Taleban. These periods of civil war (the first amongst different royal contenders that eventually led to dynastic change, the second against the power of central government, and the third against what appeared to be excessive

modernisation) have their equivalent in the recent chaos that could be traced to the transfer of power (1973) in a royal coup in which the monarchy was overthrown. Subsequently the intervention and invasion of the Soviet forces (1979) led to a drastic socio-political and economic overhaul in Afghan society. The eventual outcome of the upheavals in the 1880s and 1990s were for strongmen and groups to appear, endeavouring to restore a semblance of normality. Thus, in both these situations, though a century apart, those at the forefront of the struggle were committed to bringing the whole country under one strong central rule by waging bloody wars to achieve this. In both cases those who resisted the disintegration of the country and fought for the restoration of law and order belonged to the same Pashtun majority in Afghanistan. But while Abdur Rahman was from the royal line and had a claim to the throne, the Taleban were from a neglected sector of Afghan society coming to prominence as a religious movement, using Islam as the basis of their legitimacy and campaign.

Another topic that needs investigating is why Afghan ethnic nationalism has become an issue. All published evidence indicates that it was men from minority ethnic groups who had been effectively running the country as civil and military leaders, mainly because of their skill and education. The Pashtun Persianised kings were at the top of the hierarchy as monarchs and presidents, but the remaining bureaucracy was run by non-Pashtuns. Why was this the case? Why, despite such a favourable position of the minorities in the country, have they built such an aversion to anything Pashtun? How is it that despite their overt differences with the Pashtuns, they have been influenced by and have accepted some characteristics of Pashtun culture? Is a feeling of mistrust between the various minorities on the one hand and the Pashtun majority on the other confined to political activists amongst these groups or is it common amongst the rank and file of both Pashtun and non-Pashtun? In either case what are the real motives behind such alienation? Is there a history of colonialism and exploitation of the minority by the majority or are there some external, economic and political factors that are unique to the last part of the twentieth century? These questions are addressed and commented on in Chapters 7 and 8.

The elaboration of these periods for the purpose of understanding the recent war allows me to concentrate the discussion on terrain, environment, ethnicity, tribe, state, modernisation and Islam, which are my core issues. The discussion of the past two and a half centuries will also underline the *longue-durée* of Afghan history. Throughout Afghan history there are what can be called long-term patterns, or *longue durée* as Fernand Braudel called it. These are:

1 physical terrain and its ecology;
2 the socio-political and economic situation that comes of it.

The study of the first is a kind of historical geography 'of man in his relationships to the environment', which Braudel calls 'geo-history' (Burke 1990: 36). Afghanistan's mountainous terrain has set limits on the modes of inter-group communication. There is also the added difficulty of movement over its high mountain passes, with the limited means of traditional transport: donkeys, mules and camels. The rearing of these beasts of burden and local agricultural produce are normally confined to their localities. Thus the socio-political and economic system encompassing nation, state, religion and physical environment are all factors that have a bearing on geography and history. Braudel in *The Mediterranean* saw this in three stages. First, the 'almost timeless' relationship between 'man' and his 'environment', then the gradual change in socio-economic and political structure and lastly the fast-moving history of events. Of these three, he regards the history of events, 'though the richest in human interest' as also the most superficial. He is concerned to place 'individual and events in context . . . but he makes them intelligible at the price of revealing their fundamental unimportance' . . . as 'surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tide of history carry on their strong backs' . . . 'We must learn to distrust them' (Braudel 1995: 115–43).

In Afghanistan, the environment has shaped the people, for example the Pashtuns, over many centuries to be tough and uncompromising. Political historians, journalists and others reading modern Afghan history blame foreign invaders for not taking into account Afghanistan's terrain and the will of its ferocious people to resist outside intrusions. An American sociologist reviewing the history of nineteenth-century Afghanistan comments: 'Afghanistan was and would remain a singularly wild and anarchic place that could only be managed (if at all) by men of ruthless violence and ambition' (Edwards 1996: 3). But what these men of 'violence' have been doing to one another and to outside invaders changed the course of their and their invaders' history. These events have reinforced and added to their experience of how to react to forces from outside. These phases of historical 'reactive' movements and uprising, under the rubric of Braudel's 'events' have contributed to structural changes in Afghan socio-political outlook.

Population and society in Afghanistan

The population of Afghanistan is composed of diverse groups, speaking different languages, representing in a microcosm the macro-world of the people in the region. Locally, in nearly every province and even most districts within the provinces, different ethnic groups have intermingled, some over centuries and others relatively recently. Regionally, major ethnic groups with their other kinsman, often in larger communities, live across international borders. Thus:

> All Pashtun, for example, are not Afghan citizens. Almost an equal number live in the Tribal Agencies and the North West Frontier of Pakistan. Tajik, Uzbeks, Turkmen and Kirgiz have their own ... republics in the [former] Soviet Union. Most inhabitants of the extreme western part of Afghanistan, geographically and culturally an extension of the Iranian Plateau, are simply Persian speaking Farsiwan farmers. Baluch live in the south-western corner of Afghanistan ... (Dupree 1980: 57).

There has never been a proper governmental census for Afghanistan's population. The historical records show that successive waves of Aryans from about the second millennium BC headed for Afghanistan. They found Dravidian and some even older occupants in the mountains and valleys of the great mountain barrier Hindu Kush. Those who settled forced the original inhabitants onto higher ground, while others continued on their trek to India. After the Aryans came Greeks, Sakas, Yuehchis, Kushans, Hephthalites, Arabs, Mongols, Turks and Persians. Most of the present inhabitants of the country are the descendants of these waves of immigrants and invaders.

World population, 1977 estimates the population of the two largest groups in the country: Pashtun 52 per cent, Tajik 19.8 per cent.[1] For the first time a proper scientific census of Afghanistan has been published by the WAK Foundation For Afghanistan (WAKFA), a non-governmental organisation. This nearly six-year survey (May 1991–December 1996) gives figures for all ethnic groups in the country both as 'ethnic' and 'linguistic' groups. Thus out of a total population of about twenty million Table I.1 shows the major ethnic and linguistic percentages.

Previous Afghan governments, the United Nations and individual scholars using partial surveys or sample surveys or even just ethnic or linguistic compositions of their own, have all given different and often contradictory

Table I.1 Percentage of major Afghan ethnic groups

No.	*Name*	*Ethnicity*	*Language*
1	Pashtun	62.73	55:00
2	Tajik	12.38	33:00
3	Hazarah	9.00	[9.00]
4	Uzbek	6.10	5.80
5	Turkmen	2.69	1.40
6	Aimaq	2.68	2.68

Source: WAKFA 1999: 47–8.

Note
The 9 per cent Hazarah, who speak their *Hazaragi* dialect of Farsi (Dari), are also part of the 33 per cent Dari [Tajik] speakers listed under Language; other smaller groups are not included in the table.

figures for the population of the country and its ethnic groups.[2] Table I.1 shows the number of 'Tajik speakers' are three times their actual 'ethnic composition'. The reason for this is that Farsi/Dari has been the formal language of the government since 1747 and 7.5 per cent of Pashtuns and a small number of Uzbeks, Turkmen and other groups have over the years adopted Dari as their language. The second reason is that 9 per cent of Shi'ah Hazarahs, whatever their original language, speak their own *Hazaragi* dialect of Dari. Third, the historic, cultural and political position of Tajik Dari speakers has been the main reason for their language extending to other groups. The Aimaq are another group, who because of their favourable agricultural and grazing position in central and Western Afghanistan, have not only maintained their ground but have attracted Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Turkmen and some other smaller groups to adopt their language and dialects. Dari, because of its long attachment to Persian Courts, has been the formal language of the government. Pashto, on the other hand, because of the sheer number of its speakers, was regarded as the national language. This is not very different from India or Pakistan where Hindi and Urdu are respectively the national languages with English being the formal and governmental language. However, the 1964 constitution elevated Dari making it, with Pashto, the formal and national language of Afghanistan, while committing the country to developing Pashto further. But in the long run the formal status of a language entails prestige and also prospects for education and jobs. Therefore, Dari's formal language status despite its numerical inferiority proved to be as strong and powerful as English is vis-à-vis Urdu/Hindi in Pakistan and India.

The economy of Afghanistan remains dependent on local agricultural produce and the import and export of such items, and on a small amount of industrial goods. Local produce includes food cereals, fresh and dried fruits, and raw cotton. Of the local produce fur, wool, hides and skins, carpets and rugs, medicinal herbs, seeds and spices were major export items. Sugar, tea, petroleum products, textiles and footwear were the main import consumer products. Thus in the 1950s when development and modernisation plans were incorporated in the country's First Five Year Plan, 72 per cent of income came from agriculture, while 5 per cent came from industrial employment, cottage industries and crafts (Yosufzai 1958–59: 10). The remainder came from services including local taxes and tax on imports and exports, to give the gross national product of 38.5 billion Afghanis for the year 21 March 1958–20 March 1959.

The economy of Afghanistan, after loans for the two five-year plans of 1956–61 and 1962–66 from the Soviet Union, the USA, Germany, Japan and some European countries and the export of Afghan natural gas to the Soviet Union, changed dramatically. Natural gas became Afghanistan's major export item, but it was of little relevance to the general economy for two reasons. First, its export was almost entirely confined to the Soviet

Union, who placed even the meters on their side of the border and paid below the international rate. Second, whatever the earnings on the gas, the Russians cancelled these against the cost of the import of arms and of loans outstanding on Soviet development projects.

Afghanistan in the 1970s remained one of the poorest countries in the world with $130 per capita annual earnings, an average life expectancy of forty years, a literacy rate of less than 10 per cent and agriculture continuing to be the main occupation of at least 75 per cent of the population. The economy that had improved after the Second World War collapsed after the Soviet invasion. The resistance groups' main aim was to bring the economy to a standstill making it costly for the Soviet occupation. Thus they attacked military and civilian centres. The Communist Prime Minister, Sultan Ali Keshtmand, admitted this in April 1983:

> The country's financial situation is ... seriously affected by political and economic problems ... counter-revolutionary bands sent from abroad have destroyed 50 per cent of the country's schools, more than 50 per cent of hospitals, 14 per cent of the state's transportation vehicles, 75 per cent of all communication lines, and a number of hydroelectric and thermal electric stations. About 24 billion Afghanis damage has been done to the country. This is one half of the total amount set for developing the country's economy during the 20 years before the April (1978) Revolution.
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> (FBIS *South Asian Daily Report*, 12 April 1983)

After the departure of the Soviets and the communists, the Afghans were left counting the cost of the damage to their country. With the lessening of interest of the United States and the continuing civil war largely waged as a result of incitements by the neighbouring countries, the Afghan economy went from bad to worse. There was little chance of improvement especially when America, for its own political reasons, from being a supporter of the Afghan *jihad* during the war against the Soviets, had turned into an opponent. The US joined Russia in exerting influence at the UN and its Security Council by imposing sanctions (1999 and 2000) making it difficult for the Taleban government to obtain loans from the IMF, the World Bank or investments from other sources for Central Asian gas and oil pipelines across Afghanistan, which is considered a major regional project.

Tribe and Pashtunwali

In anthropological literature about Afghanistan, the tribe refers to a group of people who are nominally independent of the state, live in their own area, believe in the same descent ideology and share a common language and culture. Thus any Pashtun tribe is a local community, nominally

independent, occupying its specific region, believing itself to be related to other Pashtuns through extensive patrilineal genealogies, ultimately tracing their descent to the same Aryan ancestry or their putative father, Qays. Qays Abdur Rashid is supposed to have gone to Arabia from the central province of Ghore, the then Pashtun stronghold, to have converted to Islam and to have married the daughter of Islam's greatest general, Khalid bin Walid. Qays had three sons from this marriage, Sarban, Bitan and Gherghasht. All Pashtun tribes from the border of Iran to the Indus River, and those settled in India, trace their genealogy to one of these sons of Qays.

Pashtun tribes speak their common language Pashto (though with different dialects). They mostly belong to the Sunni Hanafi school of Islam and uphold their common 'ideal type' culture of *Pashtunwali* and its code of honour and shame (see section below). Thus a common ideology of descent, belief in Islam and a code of behaviour are the integral unifying factors of Pashtun society. Despite their common genealogy some of these tribes, like those in Paktia, southern Afghanistan, are further divided into the two *gwand* blocs of *towr* or black and *spin* or white. These blocs are political structures used in tribal matters. Thus an intra-tribe dispute is settled through one's own *gwand*, but in inter-tribal affairs, or when the aid of the whole of Paktia province is required, it is the representatives of the two *gwand* who adjudicate on the issue at hand.

Pashtun tribal society is not pre-literate or oral. There is extensive literature and written poetry that predate most regional languages. The first Pashto poem by Amir Koror (p. 120) dates from AD 730. This poem's structure, skilful rhyming, parable and word usage indicate that poetry must have been composed and written many years before this first example which is available to us.

Pashtun tribes and ruling dynasties have not confined themselves to their localities. They have ruled over non-Pashtuns in the Himalayan foothills, Bengal, Delhi, Kabul and Iran. 'The historic role of warrior king is part of Pathan [Pashtun] consciousness' (Ahmed 1976: 6). Pashtuns form one of the world's greatest tribal groups, occupying extensive and varied lands, and are endowed with a particular warrior upbringing and history that has been a challenge to many armies and empires throughout recorded history. An important part of being Pashtun is to be aware of and adhere to Pashtunwali.

Pashtunwali

Pashtunwali is the code of honour and shame embedded in Pashtun custom and law. Although the tribal Pashtuns have changed with time and some no longer live in the tribal area, this tribal code still remains an ideal-type of upbringing and socialising. 'Throughout the Pashto-speaking area it is virtually impossible to find even a child – male or female – who is