

May 01, 2011

## Resistance by other means: the Taliban, foreign occupation, and Afghan national identity

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### Recommended Citation

Raqib, Mariam Atifa, "Resistance by other means: the Taliban, foreign occupation, and Afghan national identity" (2011). *Law, Policy, and Society Dissertations*. Paper 24. <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20001034>

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**RESISTANCE BY OTHER MEANS: THE TALIBAN, FOREIGN  
OCCUPATION, AND AFGHAN NATIONAL IDENTITY**

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Law, Policy and Society Program

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of

Law, Policy and Society

Northeastern University  
Boston, Massachusetts  
April, 2011

# **RESISTANCE BY OTHER MEANS: THE TALIBAN, FOREIGN OCCUPATION, AND AFGHAN NATIONAL IDENTITY**

by

Mariam Atifa Raqib

Policy analysts frequently portray the Taliban resistance as an exclusively Islamic movement. Culturally deterministic notions regarding Islamic societies have negatively influenced western governments' policies towards Muslim states. The research here advances the hypothesis that the current conflict in Afghanistan is not about "Islam." At its core the Taliban resistance is a nationalist challenge to foreign forces and their Afghan allies. Furthermore, the roots of this movement are foreign occupation, continued years of war and violence, and a lack of genuine effort on the part of the incumbent regime to implement necessary socio-economic and political reforms. This work claims that the success of the Taliban movement is firmly rooted in their appropriation of religious symbols, discourse and terminology — particularly Shariat, or Islamic law — to channel the frustrations of a grieving population.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in the field of Law, Policy and Society  
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of  
Northeastern University, April 2011

## **Acknowledgements**

This dissertation has culminated from many years of research. I am privileged to have a group of people who have been supportive to me. My father's generous support and kindness laid the foundation for my personal, academic and professional life. He is my greatest teacher and my guiding light, and I honor him. I thank my mother who has taken care of me with grace and dignity. I thank my sisters for their love and considerations and for inspiring me. I am humbled by the care and attention of my extended family and friends inhabiting various parts of the world.

I have had the benefit of excellent professors. I thank Professor Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo. I arrived in his classroom as a young 18 year old and graduated 4 years later prepared to meet the world. In addition to introducing me to the study of politics, he challenged me to think as a humanitarian and "a citizen of the world". The Northeastern University community has provided me with the space in which to pursue my intellectual curiosities. Members of my dissertation community, Professor Daniel Faber, and Professor David Monje owe my many thanks for their commitment to my research.

There is one individual who has played the pivotal role in my academic career; Professor Amílcar Antonio Barreto has officially served as the chair of my dissertation committee. However, this title does not due him justice simply because this dissertation would not have been possible without his guidance. Professor Barreto's efficient manner, professionalism, and sophisticated intelligence sustained me through the arduous journey. I remain his humble student.

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## Introduction and Overview

Public policy analysts in the West, along with some Western scholars, attempt to portray the Taliban resistance to the Kabul government as an exclusively *Islamic* movement. Islam provides a system of norms, a code regulating human relations, or social morality (Roy). However, excessive attention directed to this detail disregards the spiritual dimensions of the religion. The spiritual dimension of the religion is important as it is projected in human behavior and observable in society. In this context, the individual is persuaded to join the umma (community of the believers). Membership in the umma extends the known boundaries of the political, legal, and social parameter of the universe. Hence, the adherence of certain Western scholars, Islamist intellectuals, and the way in which some of the ulama (experts on Islamic Law, or Shariat) insist upon a purely legalistic interpretation of the religion, reduce Islam to a system of strict rules.

Keeping the above considerations in mind, it is inappropriate to conclude that the Taliban's main objective is to bring about a "new world order" based on the application of Shariat (Islamic Law). Such conceptualizations of complex world politics, explicitly or implicitly, accept Bernard Lewis's distorted perspectives on Islam or Samuel Huntington's ethno-centric thinking in *Clash of Civilization*. The argument presented here is that the Taliban resistance is at its core a nationalist resistance to external (foreign) forces and their Afghan (domestic) allies, or perceived allies. In fact Political Islam is a complex phenomenon specific to diverse regions and peoples of the world. This is part of a recurring pattern of ethnic and nationalist mythmaking in Afghan history whereby key elites attempt to galvanize popular support to displace one regime by chastising it as an agent of colonial or neo-colonial rule.

Culturally deterministic notions regarding Islamic societies have a negative impact on western governments' foreign policies towards Muslim states. Therefore, scholarship that informs foreign policy on Islam and Islamic societies becomes very important. These discourses are exceptionally important as they will inform American foreign policy, and contribute to our understanding, or lack thereof, of that which is referred to as "the Islamic world" and Islamist movements. Islamist movements are products of contemporary politics and are not narrow and specific programmatic units.

## Chapter 1: Islam and the Transformation of the Afghan State

The late Louis B. Dupree identified the essential theme of Afghanistan's history as "fusion and fission" — a repeated process in which the Afghan tribes unite, especially against a foreign invader, only to disperse again into local contentions. In this context Islam, the common denominator, has held a central role among all resistance movements whether Shiite or Sunni, both inside and outside Afghanistan. Indeed within contemporary Muslim societies, the continuing debate is not completely about being Muslim; rather it is a more profound search for coherence within a number of recent political and age-old socio-cultural identities (Amin 1984: 380-81; Malik 1992: 889; Nawid 1997; Roy 1990). Islam was used as an effective ideological weapon to mobilize the Afghan people against British imperial intrusions into Afghanistan during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Nawid 1997: 581-82). Again Islam was effectively utilized during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century against the Soviet occupation and the un-Islamic character of the Kabul regime by providing legitimacy to the universality of the struggle in the form of (holy war, or jihad). Once more Islam has become the ideology of protest and resistance against the U.S. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Islam did play, and is currently playing, a crucial role in uniting a country that is diverse along ethnic, tribal, linguistic, and regional differences.

With the exception of a few thousand Hindus and Sikhs, and a few Jews, all Afghans are Muslims. Eighty percent are Sunni adhering to the Hanafite rite; and the remainder is Shiaah adhering to the Jaffarite rite. There is a small Ismaeli minority of one to two hundred thousand people (Roy 1990: 30). In Afghanistan, the concept of the nation state is a late nineteenth century

development and the state is perceived to exist on the periphery of the society. Popular allegiance, therefore, is closely associated with the local community. The unifying factor in this paradigm is Islam.

Afghanistan is an ethnically heterogeneous society comprised of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Aimaqs, and a large number of other much smaller communities.<sup>1</sup> Under the leadership of Ahmad Khan Sadozai (later called Ahmad Shah Durrani) the Pashtuns inspired the birth of the Afghan State in 1747, and the members of the Sadozai dynasty were its sovereigns until 1842. Afghanistan's largest ethnic group crafted the political and economic landscape of Afghanistan until 1992. The Durrani Empire consolidated all the Pashtuns under the jurisdiction of one political center. During the aforementioned empire's reign, this ethnic group benefited from the institutionalized military, political, and economic dominance in Afghanistan (Ahady 1995: 621).

Traditional anthropology and scholarship has perceived tribe, and hence tribal identity, preceding the state or as subordinate form of political and social development. More recent research, however, also supported by Barnett Rubin (1995: 10), explains that tribe, at least in its Middle East and Central Asian models, exists in conjunction with state. Furthermore, Rubin asserts that the tribe is one of several types of social organization acceptable to "tribespeople" (*Ibid.*). The particular model that people adhere to depends upon how tribe interacts with other existing models of social and political organizations of the state. For example, while they may disregard active participation within the context of a tribal configuration "tribespeople" will defer, nevertheless, to the tribal model when the opportunity presents itself (Tapper 1970).  
Furthermore:

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<sup>1</sup> These groups constitute about 50%, 26%, 8%, 7%, and 6%, respectively (Ahady 1995:621).

Tribe and state are best thought of as opposed modes of thought or models of organization that form a single system. As a basis for identity, political allegiance, and behavior, tribe gives primacy to ties of kinship and patrilineal descent, whereas state insists on the loyalty of all persons to a central authority, whatever their relation to each other. Tribes stresses personal, moral, and ascribing factors in status; state is impersonal and recognizes contract, interaction, and achievement. The tribal mode is socially homogeneous, egalitarian, and segmentary; the state is heterogeneous, stratified, and hierarchical. Tribe is within the individual; state is external. (Tapper 1970: 68)

In this manner, the tribe members are empowered to associate with tribal and non-tribal modes. This arrangement is realized by a political paradigm in which the people act as participants, rather than remain passive bystanders. Certainly, tribal people may join forces with non-tribal political movements and more importantly during a time when tribal associations are under attack from the state. This sense of political loyalty may reemerge during a period of state weakness or collapse. This may be witnessed in the contemporary Afghan political scene.

### **Before Islam**

Heterogeneity, the norm in contemporary Afghanistan, was also rule going back to the country's diverse pre-Islamic heritage. Afghanistan lacked ethnic homogeneity, a unified economic and administrative system, religious unity, and political stability (Gregorian 1969: 13). As a historical entity it is difficult to divide the country's history into clearly defined periods. During various historical epochs, its territorial parameters incorporated parts of larger kingdoms or empires. At other times Afghanistan's boundaries extended far beyond its contemporary borders. Local rulers dominated semi-autonomous regions that were part of bigger social and political framework. Modern Afghanistan has a history rich in art, architecture, and culture. Archaeological expeditions to Afghanistan have recovered painted pottery from the fourth

millennium BC. The strategic region north of the Hindu Kush was one of the first to be populated by people engaged in agriculture (Dupree 1980: 266). About 2000 BC, marking the pinnacle of the Bronze Age, groups of Indo-Aryans traveled south across the Oxus River. A portion of this group stayed in classical Bactria, while others continued to the Iranian plateau or to the Indus Basin. Their language was Indo-European, and they practiced an ancient religion that has survived in the traditions of the Rig Veda, which incidentally references geographic landmarks identifiable with the sites in Afghanistan (Dupree 1980: 272).

### **Islamic Conquest**

The Arabs introduced Islam into South Asia in 711 A.D. By the middle of the seventh century Islamic armies defeated the Sassanid's, who were exhausted by internal dissention. Simultaneously, a military campaign from Basra entered Sistan extending as far as the Kabul River valley (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 24). A compromise was reached; the ruler was allowed to keep his throne on the condition that he accepted Arab dominion. However, the Arab armies were unable to hold the territory. Subsequently, during the course of 400 years, conquered cities revolted against the Arabs and returned to their previous religious, political and social systems once the armies had passed through their regions. Arab progress was impeded by the local population of the region — a confederacy of the Western Turks. The struggle for domination ensued until the middle of the eight century, when the Abbasid Caliph, Abu Muslim, triumphed over the entire Turkish population of Khurassan (Afghanistan) and brought them under the umbrella of a single faith — Islam. (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 24-25). The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed the emergence of a large number of local Islamic dynasties. Once Islam was firmly

established the rulers of the periods concentrated on the more complex aspects of consolidating their empire. A period of peace followed and the rulers of the time served as great patrons of the arts and sciences and directed their attention to the refinements of civilization. The old cities of Bokhara, Merv and Samarqand became famous centers of learning (Dupree 1980: 313).

Alptigen, a Turkish ‘slave’ was a military commander and he founded the Yamini dynasty of Ghazni in the middle of the tenth century (Farser-Tytler 1967: 25-26). Alptigen, reneged against his Samanid rulers, and broke away from his masters as the Samanids reached the twilight of their political and cultural authority (*Ibid.*). It was not uncommon to see the “slaves” of western Asian ruling elites, exchange their status with that of their masters (Dupree 1980: 313). This concept of altering one’s status is quite fascinating within the Islamic context, because within the context of Islam and politics one’s status at birth is of very little importance. What was significant was merit and capabilities. Sabuktigen, Alptigen’s successor, controlled the Hindu Kush region and extended his authority into Khurasan on the west. The founders of the new dynasty launched a successive pattern of invading India and the political implications of these invasions served to give Islam both a prominent and legitimate status. Islam was no longer perceived as a foreign and usurping ideology.

Islam’s status evolved from foreign and alien to an established and legitimate ideology complete with prescriptions for politics, economics, and a justice system. More importantly the relationship between ruling elites and the subjects was defined by the prominent thinkers of the time. Intellectual life of the period was enhanced by poets Rudaki and Dakiki; Balami, the founder of Muslim Persian historiography; the geographer Abu-Sayid al-Balkhi; and the philosopher-physician Abu Ali Ibn Sina — known in the west as Avicenna (Gregorian 1969: 14).

Islam replaced Greco-Buddhist civilization and in the process transformed the country's social, cultural, and historical development (*Ibid.*, 13). Gregorian argued that from a historical point of view, Islam did not negatively impact the development of urban civilization in the region. It may be argued that Islam served as a means of liberating the region from foreign domination of the Chinese, the Turks, and the Persians. Indeed, Islam influenced an ethnically heterogeneous, politically divided region in such a manner that reduced racial consciousness and developed new religious and cultural associations. These bonds, it may be argued, overrode the then-existing ethnic divisions. Islam advocated the concept of a universal community (*umma*) that was founded on law as well as religion (Gregorian 1969: 14, Olesen 1995: 9). Olesen asserted that Islam promotes the idea of a closely-knit community of the faithful or (*umma*), the brotherhood of believers, which is "the best community produced for mankind" (*Ibid.*). Furthermore the *umma* serves as the guardian of Islam. The Muslim conquest incorporated Afghanistan within the realm of a greater political entity and the country was to benefit from regional trade and commerce. The new arrangements preserved Afghanistan's geographic importance because it intersected three strategic regions — South Asia, Central Asia, and the Mediterranean.

The eleventh century was a pivotal period in the region's history. An impressive military commander emerged on India's northwestern borders. Mahmudi Ghaznavi, a distinguished general launched 12 successful military campaigns against India and extended the region's prestige (Fraser-Tytler 1967:26). He included northwest India and Punjab to his empire, and he filled his treasury by the wealth he brought back from India (Dupree 1980: 314). In addition, the general had a group of mullahs in his service and they converted many Hindus to Islam. Mahmud Ghaznavi's empire building led to the great renaissance of the early Islamic period

(Dupree 1980). Mahmud Ghaznavi surrounded himself with the most learned men and became a patron of the arts. The cities of his vast empire were filled with the prominent thinkers of the time, and among the 900 scholars were scientist-historian al-Biruni, the poet Firdausi, and the historian al-Utbi (Dupree 1980: 314). Fraser-Tytler (1967: 26) asserted that Mahmud's "iconoclastic zeal was to carry fire and sword deep into Hindu India and to pave the way for the domination of his Muslim successors."

The next sets of infiltration were from the Mongols and Timurids (A.D. 1218-1506). Fraser-Tytler (1967: 28) contended that the Mongol invasion of Central Asia was "the greatest catastrophe that had befallen mankind". In the thirteenth century the armies of Chenghis Khan (1155-1227) invaded and laid waste to many of the richest centers of commerce and culture situated between the Jaxartes (Sri Darya) and Persia. Gregorian (1969: 17) argued that the Mongol armies not only inflicted economic devastation to the region, but more importantly interrupted the political power of Islam and "dealt the Muslim world a great psychological blow by placing its urban societies and civilization under a pagan nomadic yoke" (*Ibid.*). The devastation was so severe that eight hundred years later, the Mongol destruction of irrigation systems was never reversed and barren deserts replaced lush field. Similarly Dupree (1980:316) asserted that Chenghis Khan altered history by destroying the "finest civilization of the thirteenth century".<sup>2</sup> However, Dupree contended that Islam did not die in the rubble left behind by the powerful armies of Chenghis Khan. He supports other scholars' assertion that "in the darkest hour of political Islam, religious Islam has been able to achieve some of its most brilliant

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<sup>2</sup> Dupree (1980: 316) characterizes Genghiz Khan as "the atom bomb of his day; and western Asia still bears the scars, still suffers from the economic impact. The atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki destroyed much and killed many, but the cities are rebuilt, even if the dead cannot be returned, nor in the effects of the fallout completely dissipated from the minds and bodies of men."

successors” (Dupree 1980: 316). In fact, less than half a century after the destruction caused by Chenghis Khan, his great grandson Ghazan (1295-1304), went to great lengths to rebuild the same culture that was destroyed by his great grandfather. The Mongols were pragmatists and soon realized they could benefit immensely from an urban and agricultural civilization.

For over 200 years the Persian Safavid dynasty and the Indian Mongol dynasty (1526-1707) competed for control over Afghanistan. This rivalry ensued in political unrest and tensions in the region. However, the political realities of the time provided the opportunity for the Pashtuns to realize that while they were not sovereigns in their own land, it did not mean that the Pashtun tribes were marginalized from politics. The Pashtun Tukhians as well as the Hotakis asserted their authority and established Pashtun principalities and gained sovereign control over their regions (Habbibi 1967: 232; Dupree 1980: 321-323). Also, the mountain Pashtun tribes launched a resistance 1658 and gained independence from the Mongols and they were masters of their own destiny until 1675 (Habbibi 1967: 232). Many Pashtun tribes remained independent — the Abdali and Ghilzai rivalries for political domination over Herat, Farah and Qandahar serve appropriate examples. Historically, the presence of foreign invaders would serve to unify or “fuse” the Afghan tribes.

### **Ahmad Shah Durrani, and the Durrani Empire (A.D. 1747): The formation of a national identity**

The kingdom of Afghanistan was founded in 1747 and by 1750 the Afghan king began consolidating power within the country’s modern boundaries (Ahady 1995: 621). During the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries Afghanistan did not have an independent political identity of

its own and was caught in the political rivalry between India's Mughal Empire and Persia's Safavid Empire (Olesen 1995:21). The death of Nadir Shah Afshar in Persia finally provided the perfect opportunity for the Pashtun tribes to assert their independence and define their geographic boundaries. For the first time in the history of the region referenced as modern Afghanistan, local rulers triumphed. The Ghilzais and the Abdalis were the most prominent and politically astute Pashtun clans (Dupree 1980: 332-41; Fraser-Tytler 1967: 48-53; Habbibi 1967: 60). At the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries the Persian and Indian Empires were politically and economically exhausted from their rivalries. Intermittently local political elites revolted against the two rivals and attempted to gain independence. The political ambitions of these elites were finally fruitful when the fragmentation of the Safavid Empire ensued after the assassination of Nadir Shah Afshar. The Pashtuns realized an opportunity to establish an empire that would endure foreign domination. The powerful Ghilzai and Abdali clans set aside their grievances against one another and took advantage of the opportune moment to gain their independence. The Abdalis and the Ghilzais benefited from the brilliant tactics of Ahmad Shah Abdali, chief of the Abdali tribe in Qandahar who at age 26 was elected king by his tribal peers in Qandahar.

In October 1747, the time-honored Loya Jirga, an assembly comprised of distinguished Ghilzai, Abdali, Tajik, Uzbek, Hazarra, and Baluch chieftains met in Qandahar and elected Ahmad Khan Sadozai — later called Ahmad Shah Durrani — as their king. The Loya Jirga is a traditional institution which provides a forum for consultation, historically between the king and tribal leaders, on matters of great substance. The Loya Jirga concluded by establishing the Sadozai dynasty (1747-1842), and served to inaugurate an autonomous Afghan state. This

moment held historical significance because it ushered what would become two and a half centuries of Pashtun rule. Louis Dupree's application of the term "fusion" is relevant to the following two and a half-century of Pashtun rule. He stated that "in its heyday, [the Durrani Empire] would extend from Central Asia to Delhi, from Kashmir to the Arabian Sea" (Dupree 1980: 334). Furthermore, next to the Ottoman Empire, the Durrani Empire was the "greatest Muslim Empire" in the second half of the eighteenth century (*Ibid.*).

Initially the new kingdom was beset by ethnic and religious divisions. The rulers were faced with threats of foreign encroachments. In their bid to preserve the status of the monarchy and the sovereignty of the Afghan kingdom, they saw the necessity of military rule (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 62). Ahmad Shah Durrani was aware that he was surrounded on one side by the disintegrating Mongol Empire and on the other side the ensuing political turmoil in the Persian Empire presented him with opportunities to extend his empire. It was during Durrani's reign, from 1747 to 1773, that the region was consolidated to form modern Afghanistan.

Ahmad Shah Durrani's new government may be characterized as a federal republic rather than an absolute monarchy (Nawid 1997: 582). The king was selected by his peers and he was obliged to rule in accordance with principles of the Shariat and the tribal code of honor (Pashtunwali) that stipulated interpersonal relationships as well as relationships between the tribes (*Ibid.*). Both the Shariat and Pashtunwali prescribed a set of checks on the ruler and made him accountable to his peers. In this context, the other Afghan chiefs could contest the king and even remove him from power if he deviated (Gregorian 1969: 46). Through his successful military expeditions Durrani built an empire and in the region he led in a leadership position. When faced with the threat presented by the Hindu Maharatas Shah Waliullah the prominent 18<sup>th</sup>

century Muslim reformer called for a jihad and requested that Ahmad Shah Durani's lead the jihad. (Habbibi 1967). Ahmad Shah Durrani agreed to embark on a holy war. The 1761 battle of Paniput against the Maharatas represented the pinnacle of his military accomplishments in the Indian sub-continent.

Afghan historians characterized Durrani as a genuinely religious man. Habbibi claimed that Ahmad Shah Durrani, was a devout Hanafi Sunni Muslim and that the king was well versed in the traditions of Islamic Law. As he extended the geographic boundaries of his empire and consolidated power, Durrani established the Hanafite interpretation of Islamic Law as official policy in Afghanistan (Habbibi 1970: 299). The king set to work at once to consolidate power and extend his kingdom. Ahmad Shah Durrani's military expeditions were informed by the knowledge that winning the respect and allegiance of his people required him to not only lead his men into war, but to succeed on the battle field as well. This was particularly exacerbated by the internal rivalries in his young empire. There were even plots to overthrow him, and this was particularly exacerbated by the fact that the king was away from Qandahar, his capital. As Louis Dupree (1980) has remarked, "no Pashtun likes to be ruled by another — particularly someone from another tribe, sub-tribe, or section". Thus, a combination of ambition, military genius helped him to continue with his empire building. At the conclusion of his military campaigns he returned to Qandahar from the Punjab armed with a treasure convoy, exceeding one million pounds (Fraser-Tytler 1969: 62-63). It is important to note that Ahmad Shah Durrani fought wars in order to illuminate the prestige of the new Afghan kingdom. However, in order to extend legitimacy for his wars, his military campaigns needed to be couched in religious terms. In other

words the Afghan king needed the blessing from superior power to sanction his intrusion into foreign lands.

### **Islam in Afghanistan**

Daily life in Afghanistan is informed by religion. The main tenets of Islam define the boundaries for intellectual dimensions of the individual, as well as the system of values and the code of individual behavior (Roy1990: 30). While, this system of values and code of behavior may contradict other codes, particularly the tribal, Islam dominates as the prominent source of legitimacy and universal values. In addition to the classical heritage of the Quran and the Hadith (the traditions of the Prophet Mohammad) there is also a rich cultural and political heritage of the Islamic civilization. This civilization is refined and in a sophisticated manner has successfully synchronized the poetry of Persia, and the military accomplishments of the Timurids, Uzbeks, and Mughals. Accomplished thinkers of the early Islamic Civilization reinterpreted and disseminated the knowledge of the ancient Greeks. The Muslims are credited with preserving the philosophy of the Greeks whose heritage the Muslims kept alive when it was forgotten throughout most of medieval Europe.

The political and social foundation of Islam is diverse and pertains to a tribal / non-tribal or rural/urban environment. In addition, the relationship between ideology and religion depends upon whether a group is secularized or fundamentalist, traditionalist, or reformist (Roy 1980: 30-35). Certainly, other forms of religious expression exist, each replete with its own dynamics and symbolism. Roy cautioned that in this context, it is crucial to distinguish between various terms such as the village mullah, the alim (doctor of law), the sayed (descendant of the prophet), the pir

(a charismatic leader, in charge of a Sufi brotherhood) and finally the Islamic intellectual. Hence, in Afghanistan it is difficult to identify an official Islam as opposed to an unorthodox Islam.

In this context, religion is informed by diverse social categories — the alim, the religious scholar, the pir, and the contemporary Islamist. The distinctions are necessary because the aforementioned individuals play a role within specific political and social spaces and their authority in many cases is context specific. For example, a village mullah might not be worldly, yet his responsibilities and functions link him with the village level and frequently outside the sphere of influence of the state apparatus. He has an important role in the daily lives of the village populations, and many who adhere to his teachings are mainly uneducated peasants. The alim operates within the context of a sophisticated legal system and receives state patronage and acknowledgment. Hence various modes of religious expression and symbolism are both content specific as well as context specific. Diverse modes of religious expression exist within the parameters of the legal jurisdiction of the ulama, and the spirituality of the Sufis and the political Islam of the Islamists (Roy 1980).

In Afghanistan, Islam prevails both as a religion and a culture. Islam has a profound impact on the way in which religion defines daily life, on language, a meaningful expression or symbol, and even influences an individual's cultural identity (Roy 1980: 34). Islam provides society with a set of universal values and ethics that transcends the limitations of the material world and empowers and elevates the umma—the community of the Muslims to a prestigious status. Membership in the umma creates a sense of fraternity that extends beyond race, ethnicity, economics, as well as physical and geographic boundaries. Islam defines a system of norms, a code for regulating human behavior, and other relations in a world where it is incumbent upon

the individual to adhere to social morality. In addition, there is a crucial spiritual component which is identified in the behavior and practices of the Muslim and which allows the opportunity to transcend beyond oneself and access the universal beyond.

The universal nature of Islam does not exclusively define all norms in Afghan society. In fact, in Afghanistan's tribal regions, a tribal code (Pashtunwali) and the assembly (jirga) hold great importance. The tribal code is an important institution and has historically contested the influence of the state. Pashtunwali defines acceptable behavior within the community and informs the relationship between the tribes (Gregorian 1968: 41; Roy 1990: 34-36). Pashtunwali operates both as an ideology as well as a body of common law, which has evolved its own sanctions and institutions (Gregorian 1968: 41-42; Roy 1990: 34-36).

Roy (1990) assessed the foundation of political power as secular. Furthermore, he stresses that the secular nature of the tribal code means that it frequently contradicts Shariat. The Pashtun identity is derived from being integrated in a tribal structure. Therefore, in this context, Pashtunwali and Shariat may be observed as two parallel and yet opposing forces. Similarly the two institutions of Shariat and Pashtunwali present distinctive images of social order. The Pashtun tribal code's primary objective is to prevent the emergence of an asymmetrical relationship between the Pashtun tribes — which are historically under threat either by the state or infrequently by foreign entities. A Pashtun identifies himself in close association with the Pashtun tribe. The Shariat frowns upon this form of tribal identification and attempts to transcend specific groups such as tribe, qawm and other asabiyya (group identity) and the universality of the Muslim community or umma always takes precedence over race.

The Afghan monarchs were careful to tailor their policies to conform to Islamic Law and Pashtunwali, and paid particular attention to the decisions of the jirgas or tribal councils (Gregorian 1968: 40). Although, the Afghan tribal code may be perceived as more egalitarian, it is also restrictive. Similarly, the jirga was based upon the concept of communal authority; “theoretically, every tribesman was both a soldier and a lawmaker and could aspire to leadership” (*Ibid.*, 40-41). The main objective of Pashtunwali is not to transcend the specifics of group identity, but to establish a consensus among the members of the tribe. Roy (1990: 36) asserts that within the parameters of political space in Afghanistan, strict adherence to Pashtunwali isolates the Pashtun community, while the Shariat, which disregards ethnic groups, define a universal social order striving to link the individual to the Muslim community at large. In this paradigm, the ulama *which* is perceived as a threat to tribal identity recognizes the legitimacy of only one institution in Afghanistan — the Islamic Law or Shariat.

### **Europe, the Great Game, and the Afghan “Buffer State”**

In the past couple of centuries the political and social space in Afghanistan has been transformed into an arena for imperialist rivalries among regional and global powers. The country was caught in the contest for hegemony in Asia between the British and Russian Empires (Dupree 1980: 362-363; Gregorian 1968: 91). At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Great Britain and Russia began expanding empires into central and southern Asia (Gibbs 1987: 366). The British took particular interest in the Afghan region, Turkistan, and the lands of the Caucasus. During this time, the British did not seek direct colonization; rather, they persuaded local elites to accept British *advice*, which translated into accepting a resident British political

officer, and British control over the country's foreign relations. Such measures were designed to impede the progress of their rival. Afghanistan was situated directly between the British and Russian empires and both powers saw the Afghan region as their land-route to India. Abdul Samad Ghaus (1988: 1) stated: "the possession of India has always held a strange fascination for the great Asian and European empire builders." Dupree finds it difficult to blame either power for immersing Afghanistan in their rivalries. He states that "both (Russia and Great Britain) were imperialists driving for territory, natural resources, and international power, so the onus of such imperialism should be equally divided" (Dupree 1980: 380).

In 1801, Russia annexed the Kingdom of Georgia, and continued on the quest to absorb other territories in the Caucasus region. Russia's regional control was significantly enhanced after 1828 — a period marking the end of a long war with Persia which successfully reduced Persian territory and influence (Gregorian 1968: 94-95). Military victories in the region gave Russia significant diplomatic, political, and economic gains. Two important peace accords — the treaty of Turkmanchai (with Persia) and the Treaty of Adrianople (with the Ottoman Empire in 1829) — confirmed Russian gains and introduced a period of intrigues in Central Asia (Dupree 1980: 364; Fraser-Tytler 1967: 80; Gregorian 1968: 95).<sup>3</sup> The Treaty of Turkmanchai was significant because it altered British policy towards Persia and Afghanistan (Gregorian 1969:99). This imperial rivalry came to be known as the "Great Game" and it became one of the most important diplomatic issues during the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This treaty gave the Russians full control of the South Caucasus. Furthermore, the Persians paid a fee of 3 million pounds, and allowed extra-territorial rights and commercial advantages to the Russians (Gregorian 1969: 95).

<sup>4</sup> There are a diverse set of claims as to who first used this term, but it became an internationally recognized term. Later, the expression was institutionalized by Lord Curzon, who served two terms as

By November 1838 the overall policy, which primarily began in order to make commercial gains in the region, sought to extend British influence into Afghanistan and establish the country as a “buffer state” (Dupree 1980: 369). The British launched two invasions of Afghanistan known as the Anglo-Afghan Wars. The Governor-General of India, Lord Auckland (1836-42) entered into negotiations with Shah Shuja, the exiled ruler of Afghanistan and advocated the buffer state to serve as a barrier between Russian and British spheres of influence (Nawid 1997: 587). The British were aware that “the safety of India depends on the degree of control which the rulers of India can exert on the mountains of Hindu Kush and the Oxus Valley beyond, for only thus can the ‘barbarian’ be kept at arm’s length” (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 282).

Lord Auckland issued what became known as the Simla Manifesto in October 1838. The Simla Manifesto was propaganda, designed to challenge the credibility of Dost Mohammad Khan, the king of Afghanistan — a competent king who for pragmatic purposes sought Britain’s friendship (Ewans 2002: 43). He was deposed in a military campaign that became known as the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-42). The British advance into Afghanistan and the occupation was known as the Forward Policy and was initiated by Lord Auckland, governor general of India from 1836 to 1839 (Ghaus 1988:2). The Forward Policy’s primary objective was to control Afghanistan through a British-appointed ruler (Adamec 1974: 2). This policy was at times abandoned in favor of a less imposing “masterly inactivity”(Ghaus 1988: 2). In an attempt to pursue their own agenda, the British promoted the king’s rival, Shah Shuja, and Ranjit Singh. In December 1838, the 20,000 strong Army of the Indus embarked on its invasion of Afghanistan.

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India’s viceroy. Administrators and senior military commanders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century began to view the geo-politics beyond the North West frontier of India in this context.

The invasion proved to be disastrous, and within only a couple of weeks local resentment surfaced in response to the presence of the foreign troops.

Resentment spread throughout Kabul in the winter of 1839-40. The occupying army's presence led to an exorbitant increase in the cost of food and other basic necessities. The British troops attitudes toward the locals were careless and condescending. The tribal leaders, particularly the Ghilzai who controlled the Kabul-Peshawar road, agreed to the foreign control in return for financial compensation. However, this compromise was not long lasting and the people revolted and were determined to expel the foreign occupiers of their country. The resistance escalated and on November 2 a mob attacked the home of Sir Alexander Burnes. Burnes and his brother were killed (Fraser-Tytler 1967:115). The success of this attack precipitated revolts elsewhere in the country. A small British force leaving Ghazni for the capital was destroyed. The army's failure to rescue Burnes, or take effective retribution for his death, encouraged the resisters. The British military presence became paralyzed and the few remaining troops, who were incapable of defending themselves, lost morale.

The British were compelled to evacuate the country. On January 6, a garrison of 16,500 British troops left Kabul (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 117-119). They were promised safe passage from Afghanistan; however, the Ghilzai Pashtuns attacked them en route. These attacks, combined with extreme weather conditions, nearly annihilated the British forces (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 117-119). Only one man, Dr. Brydon, survived the traumatic journey and reached Jalalabad wounded on a dying horse. For Britain, the first invasion of Afghanistan did not end favorably. This defeat impeded British imperial designs for the next four decades (Adamec 1974: 2). The British returned for a second military intervention in Afghanistan. The Second Anglo-Afghan War

(1878-79) ended in the Treaty of Gandamak (Gibbs 1987: 366). According to the treaty, Afghanistan remained a sovereign state. However, the British government was to control Afghanistan's foreign policy, and Britain's Indian empire eventually annexed a large area of eastern Afghanistan. This annexation — the Durrand Line — remains a disputed territory between Afghanistan and Pakistan and it remains a source of discontent for it divided the Pashtuns.

A comprehensive study of the political events of latter centuries including the modern times requires a brief explanation of the significant factors involved in the formation of early history of the region we now recognize as Afghanistan. The objective of the following chapter is to identify the strategic role that Islam plays in the internal political developments of the country as well as the role of Islam to challenge foreign ideologies or interventions. The Anglo-Afghan Wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century should serve as sound example. When foreign interference in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan has occurred, without exception a response has been launched. While the essence of the resistance is to maintain the independence and autonomy of the country, there is also the important component of religion that must be considered.

## **Chapter 2: Islam, Resistance, and the Centralization of Power in the Nineteenth Century**

The previous chapter focused on the strategic role Islam held in the early transformation of the region now called Afghanistan. Chapter 2 continues with the study of the important role of Islam in Afghan society and politics. In the absence of a strong central authority and the presence of an ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous society, the strategic use of Islam proved successful by both political and religious leaders. Afghan elites sanctioned Islam as a means to mobilize the diverse population and bring about desired transformations in state and society. In fact, the authority that Islam provides to leaders and groups for articulating dissatisfaction is not exclusively a nineteenth century phenomenon, nor is the political use of Islam confined within the boundaries of Afghanistan. Throughout history the symbolism, language and discourse of Islam has been utilized by both political elites and non-elites to legitimize their claims. For the Afghan political and religious leadership Islam is a shield that cloaks their person as well as ideas in legitimacy so that they may appeal to the masses and win favor for particular policies they wish to implement. Islam does not exist, exclusively, within the purview of the elites. For the Afghan masses, Islam and in particular the political use of Islam holds great appeal. In this social and political milieu, in its most fundamental sense, political Islam should be seen as an ideology of protest. Thus, political Islam becomes a beacon around which the groups most detrimentally affected by the existing order converge, whether it is the abuse of power of the existing leadership or a foreign occupation to which they are responding. It is an opportunity for the masses to converge in their criticism of the *status quo*.

The relationship between the elites, the masses and Islam was reinforced particularly during moments of national crises. Islam is always considered sacred and beyond reproach and enjoyed the enviable position around which the diverse Afghans could congregate. Imposing this cohesion was essentially a form of manipulation of power by the ruling elites — regardless of their own personal relationship with Islam. It is quite possible that the leaders were genuine Muslims; however, in order to achieve political gains, Afghan elites emphasized principles of Islam — the common denominator that would hold appeal to all Afghans. The elites were well aware that the Afghans held strong emotional and spiritual attachments to Islam, and the elites, both political and religious expended great effort in order to capitalize on the emotions of the population and win them in favor of their policies.

### **Strategic Geo-Politics**

Modern Afghanistan developed at the crossroads of diverse cultures, empires and peoples. The historian on Afghanistan, Hassan Kakar writes that Afghanistan is famous for “the variety of its physical features, climate, inhabitants, languages, religious beliefs, and modes of life” (Kakar 1979: xv). The modern Afghans are descended from an Indo-European or Aryan peoples combined with Turkic, Mongolian, and other groups (Gregorian 1968:28-29). Afghanistan intersects three major geographic regions — Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. Its location, in the heart, of Asia, made this country a major conduit for ancient trade routes. This location also meant that it is open to outside incursions. Great generals and conquerors of ancient times such as Alexander the Great, Tamerlaine, Chengis Khan and others throughout the ages attempted to realize their political ambitions by incorporating Afghanistan

into their respective domains. Yet, history has demonstrated more than once that while it is not as challenging for conquerors, generals to enter the country's borders, its occupation becomes a deadly affair for the invaders adventuring to control the region and the people. The geographic zone now acknowledged as modern Afghanistan has been ruled by diverse groups of political elites, each with their own particular methods of administration. While ruling elites have proved their tenure in office transient, the one constant in this scenario is geography. This lack of successful outside military expeditions may be attributed to the country's inhospitable and mountainous terrain; a topography that is quite familiar to locals. However, ignorance of this landscape has attested deadly for outsiders regardless of their numbers or military strength. That is why in contemporary times, Afghanistan has gained the title of the "graveyard of empires." With regards to Britain's nineteenth-century defeat in Afghanistan Fraser-Tytler (1967: 109) states that "there is a fate about this restless frontier which has been too strong for mankind ever since the days when the Greek rulers of Bactria died fighting in face of the invading nomads..."

Until the middle of the eighteenth century Afghanistan was divided between the Sunni Mughal Empire of India and the Shiite Safavid Empire of Persia. Although modern Afghanistan did not have an autonomous identity of its own, there were periodic indigenous attempts, especially by the Pashtuns, to gain independence. The disintegration of the Safavid Empire and the assassination of the ruler Nadir Shah Afshar, presented an opportunity for the birth of the Durrani Empire. Pashtun tribes formed the military foundation for a central political authority (Nawid 1997:582).<sup>5</sup> While several of Afghanistan's many ethnic groups were, and remain, organized along tribal lines, the Pashtuns historically have been the state's dominant group.

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<sup>5</sup> Pashtu, the language of the Pashtuns belongs to the Aryan subdivision of the Indo-European languages (Fraser-Tytler 1967:49; Dupree 1980:70).

Fraser-Tytler (1967: 48) refers to the Pashtuns as “true Afghans, rulers of the country, and principal element in its diverse population.” Yet the Pashtuns are not one united people. Gregorian (1968:30) identifies the Abdali or Durrani as the largest and most prominent Pashtun tribe in Afghanistan. The Durrani Pashtuns comprised the ruling dynasty in Afghanistan until 1973 and several of the most important families in the country come from this community. Until the Communist revolution of 1978, the Durrani Pashtuns dominated the strategic political and economic sectors. The second largest Afghan tribe is comprised of the Ghilzai Pashtuns. Historically, the Ghilzai and the Durrani Pashtuns have been political rivals.

The Durrani Empire was founded in 1747 by the election of Ahmad Khan Abdali as ruler in a Pashtun tribal jirga (council). The assembly of prominent Ghilzai, Abdali, Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, and Baluch chieftains met in Qandahar. He was renamed Ahmad Shah Durrani (1747-72), thus introducing 250 years of Pashtun rule. The 26 year-old sovereign was obliged to rule according to the stipulations of the Shariat (Islamic Law) and the Pashtun tribal code of honor (Pashtunwali). Pashtunwali regulated relations between individuals and among tribes. In fact, subsequent Afghan monarchs were subject to the same limitation of authority; their actions had to conform to Shariat, to the Pashtunwali, and especially to the decisions of the jirgas or tribal councils (Gregorian 1968:40).

Ahmad Shah Durrani successfully established his authority throughout modern Afghanistan and incorporated into his empire vast territories from Mashad to Kashmir and Delhi and from the Amu Darya to the Arabian Sea (Olesen 1995: 22). Under the leadership of Ahmad Shah Durrani, the Durrani Pashtuns not only made Afghanistan independent, but they also established an empire. Dupree (1980: 334) asserts that next to the Ottoman Empire, the Durrani

Empire was the “greatest Muslim Empire in the second half of the eighteenth century.” The empire survived for 100 years and encompassed vast territories and diverse populations from Central Asia to Delhi, from Kashmir to the Arabian Sea. Ahmad Shah Durrani’s military accomplishments established him as a leader of jihad — a defensive war waged against non-Muslims (Nawid 1997:582). Durrani’s most notable military accomplishment was the battle of Panipat, India in 1761. Shah Waliullah invited Ahmad Shah Durrani to fight the Maharata Hindus (Dupree 1980: 337-338; Habibi 1970). The Afghan scholar Abdul Hay Habibi identifies Ahmad Shah Durrani as a religious man. While Durrani is considered a genuinely devout Muslim, nevertheless, his military accomplishments against the non-Muslim Hindus earned him many honors by ordinary Afghans and most important by the religious community. The invitation by Shah Waliullah to wage a jihad against Maharata Hindus is an honor to the Afghan king. In this context, Ahmad Shah Durrani is a Pashtun warrior who protects his Muslim subjects and territories from non-Muslims. It is also noteworthy that Shah Waliullah, who is considered as one of the most respected Islamic thinkers of South Asia and Afghanistan, extended to him the invitation. Shah Waliullah is lauded for his ability to interpret the Quran and explain the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence. In this sense, Durrani’s personal religious devotion combined with blessings from an esteemed religious and spiritual leader elevated his reputation as a pious Muslim leader and guardian of the faith. The cooperation between the two individuals helped to augment the reputation of a respected warrior and king. Barreto (2009: 6) reminds us that glory and honor are not an intrinsic phenomenon linked to the individual and that these values must be conferred by outsiders. In this regard the “outsiders” must be individuals of significant merit in society; such individuals perceive themselves as guardians of the authenticity

of traditions. It is not the purview of the ordinary to dabble in the bequeath of honorific titles or decorations.

The Afghan ruler was a Hanafi Sunni and had extensive knowledge about the Shariat. Sunni Islam is divided into four principal schools of law. The other three schools are Maliki, Shafi'I, Hanbali and the Hanafi. Each school is named after its founder, Abu Abd al-Malik, Muhammad bin Idris Shafi, Ibn Hanbal, and Abu-Hanifa (Kakar 1979:166). As Ahmad Shah Durrani secured power, he anointed one — the Hanafi interpretation, which is also practiced in India and Turkey — as the official state doctrine in Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the empire faced two major challenges: internal disorder and external invasions and pressures (Dupree 1980: 343). The Durrani Empire was beset by a set of internal rivalries. The empire's final dismemberment occurred by 1818, as a result of wars of succession among Ahmad Shah Durrani's grandsons. However, the state the Durranis established proved permanent. Kakar attributes this endurance of the state to the fact that the Durranis reinforced the tradition of dynastic rule and this was coupled with the desire of the Muslims of the region to have a kingdom of their own as well as the need to have a sovereign who could successfully defend Islam. The facilitation of these ends required the support of the religious leadership. Influential religious leaders were frequently called upon to legitimize political authority. During succession disputes, rivals to the throne often sought out powerful members of the clergy to bolster their claims and challenge the opponents. Rivalries between political opponents, and wars of succession between the Durrani Pashtun princes and power struggles offered religious leaders and tribal chiefs opportunities to acclimate themselves

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<sup>6</sup> The Hanafi school Afghan jurists were required to settle cases in accordance with Shariat as defined by the classical jurist Abu Hanifa (d.767) (Kakar 1979:35).

according to new political developments and to assume new power and influence (Nawid 1997: 582).

European powers' growing interests in the region, in particular Czarist Russia and the Britain, challenged the autonomy of the Afghan state. Hence, the first 75 years of the nineteenth century was a period of intense political turbulence in Afghanistan. Internal rivalries coupled with competition between two imperial powers, Britain and Russia turned the Afghan landscape into the battleground of the "Great Game." Civil wars and internal political intrigues were not exclusively responsible for external invasions. The geographic location of Afghanistan made it a strategic asset in any empire's quest for the control of South Asia, "defensively as well as offensively" (Dupree 1980: 343). Fraser-Tytler explains some of the causes contributing to this expansion. Imperial greed, the need to appropriate the resources of faraway lands, the consequences of political and economic conflict in Europe, the ambitions of profit maximizing trading companies, and the policies of ambitious men hungry for power were among those causes (Fraser-Tytler 1967:75).

The set of internal and imperial political contentions challenged the authority of the central government and brought about the destruction of the highly structured judicial and administrative system set up by Ahmad Shah Durrani. The country was still a tribal alliance, and in the absence of a strong centralized state and centralized economic system, self sufficient rural communities gained *de facto* independence. The existence of the state was only for the purpose of protecting tribal territories. In this context, a national consciousness that called on the Afghans to give up regional autonomy and persuade them to redirect their loyalties to a central system of administration was alien. These center-periphery divisions provided ample opportunity

for the clergy to expand its influence on social, legal and political matters. A transformation occurred in the status and influence of the high ranking ulama, a group closely linked to the central administration. This group saw its social, political, and legal leverage shrink. It was replaced by a local religious leadership closely affiliated with the populations residing on the outskirts of the urban areas and hence, easily able to extend its influence in the rural regions of Afghanistan (Nawid 1997: 602). The nineteenth century was witness to the expansion of the political influence of this group. Subsequent political developments would provide this group the opportunity to have near exclusive authority to influence the Afghan ruling elite, marshaling the general population against internal political forces or outside agents, and defining political legitimacy (*Ibid*).

The powerful role of the religious leadership was further enhanced by continued Russian territorial advances in Asia. Their rival, the British, found the Russian encroachment alarming. In addition to Afghanistan and India, the Persian and Ottoman Empires were also put in a precarious political situation thanks to these Russian advances. London's apprehensions regarding Russian advances led the British to adopt the Forward Policy designed to secure British control in Persia and Afghanistan. The individual in charge of promoting this policy was Sir Henry Rawlinson, who argued that the czarist advances to the north challenged British supremacy in Southern Asia (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 133). Afghanistan was transformed into India's "frontier" and no European state was allowed to pursue commercial or political activities in the region or to intervene in its domestic or foreign affairs (Gregorian 1968: 96). This aggressive policy included paying subsidies to the Amir, the provision of arms and of officers to train his army, and the Amir needed to accept the establishment of a permanent British envoy at Kabul

(Fraser-Tytler 1967:133). The Forward Policy was a response to the British failure in the First Anglo-Afghan War (1838-42). After the debacle of this conflict, the British maintained an “inactive” policy regarding Afghanistan. This policy was quickly abandoned once Russia advanced into Central Asia in the 1860s and 1870s. The British invasions of Afghanistan in 1839 and 1878 were met by fierce Afghan resistance. The Afghans referred to the resistance as jihad—a war waged by Muslims in defense religion and territory. The clergy served as the jihad’s most fervent supporters (Nawid 1997: 602).

### **Islam and Pashtunwali**

We must now direct our attention to the essentials of this chapter, and identify the strategic role that Islam plays in the internal political development of the country as well as the utilization of Islam by political and religious elites as a powerful force challenging foreign interference and ideologies. In Afghanistan, Pashtunwali structured the ideological foundation upon which the Afghan state was formed from 1747 to the middle of the nineteenth century (Olesen 1997:36). Pashtunwali is an egalitarian tribal model and conformity to it characterizes what it means to be an “authentic” Pashtun. However, this does not mean that Pashtunwali enjoyed Afghan society’s exclusive frame of reference. A second component needs to weld together the Afghan society which was divided along ethnic, linguistic and regional lines. Roy (1990: 35) asserts that Pashtunwali is both an ideology and a system of common law “which has evolved its own sanctions and institutions.” The unifying force in this reality was Islam. Ninety-nine percent of Afghans acknowledge Islam as their religion. Still, in the course of Afghan history, “social organization, ethnic and linguistic ties, and regional economic interests

sometimes transcend the importance of religious affinity” (Gregorian 1968: 39). While kinship ties were reinforced, particularly during moments of national crises, Islam enjoyed the enviable position around which the diverse Afghans could coalesce. This cohesion was essentially a form of manipulation by the ruling elites, regardless of their own personal relationship with Islam. In all likelihood they lived out their lives as genuine Muslims; however, in order to achieve political gains, elites emphasized principles of Islam — the common denominator that would be acceptable to all Afghans.

Afghans have a historical, cultural and emotional attachment to Islam. This need to utilize religious symbols and religious references become most obvious during periods of national crises. During moments when the Afghan kingdom suffered internal or external forces, elites determined to bring about order and stability. Regarding elite behavior, Ranger (2007: 249) explains that elite efforts are the result of “conscious determination to re-establish order and security and a sense of community by means of defining and reinforcing tradition.” It is significant to note the distinction between “custom” and “tradition.” Hobsbawm and Ranger (2007) explain that custom is organic, free flowing, and malleable over time. “Tradition” on the other hand is artificial – it is a custom appropriated by elites who in a careful and measured manner designate one custom among many from a particular moment in history and designate it culturally authentic. This anointing of one custom as authentic also means that other customs are inauthentic and affiliation with such customs is not permissible. It also imbues the elites designating this tradition the powerful status of authenticity guardians. Hobsbawm and Ranger provide provocative examples of this strategic use of defining customs as authentic or inauthentic. In the process elites (state and non-state) elites anoint themselves culture’s

“legitimate” guardians. In the Afghan context, tradition implies the use of Islam as a legitimate tool to reinforce a sense of community and bring about favorable change. Amílcar Barreto (2009: 6) provides an excellent explanation of the existence of a need to build solidarity with the community satisfying the individual’s deep seated emotional needs. In fact, it is this profound desire to merge with “our” community that provides the incentive to join forces with particular collective struggles. We do not feel the need to join forces with the collective struggles of every group, only the struggles that we hold emotionally close (*Ibid*). This phenomenon is understood very well by political elites and this is why they will spare no efforts in spinning their stories in order to appeal to the masses and to promote group solidarity and win people in their favor.

As Iftikhar H. Malik (1992: 901) states, “primordial identities can be assertive and volatile on occasion, leading to righteous situation... in Central Asia, Islam can be viewed as a solidifying factor in an anti-colonial struggle and a major contributory in the evolution of a composite identity.” The Anglo-Afghan Wars of the nineteenth century and the Afghan resistance are examples of the “solidifying factor” that symbolizes the symbiotic relationship between Islam and politics in Afghanistan. The deliberate use of religion as a political tool to consolidate power at the center and unify the diverse populations is not exclusively an Afghan political phenomenon. It is a widespread practice spanning diverse geographic boundaries, the political and social systems of diverse peoples as well as historical epochs. Throughout its history, Islam has been utilized both by leaders to legitimize their rule (Nasr 2001), and by revolutionaries to denounce illegitimate leaders. The two Anglo-Afghan Wars were significant to the internal political development of Afghanistan. The two cases of nineteenth-century foreign occupation and resistance demonstrate that foreign interference in Afghan domestic

affairs triggers a popular resistance. Afghan monarchs as well as the ulama utilized Islam as a strategic tool to mobilize segments of the population, guarantee the country's security and their tenure in office. As we shall see, the discourse of the resistance is couched in religious terminologies and symbols.

Afghans waged a jihad within the context of Islam whenever the country's territories were invaded. jihad was waged not only to protect the physical terrain and the national boundaries of the country, but the religion of the people as well. Kakar (1979: 176) asserts that the tradition of jihad in Muslim Afghanistan bordering Hindu India was always strong. Afghan kings frequently called their subject to jihad against their non-Muslim adversaries. Jihad served the purpose of galvanizing popular support to protecting land, religion and women. This guarding of the land of Islam from the transgressions of non-Muslims ascribes to jihad a defensive characteristic rather than the classic notion of jihad which consisted of military action to proliferate Islam. When the ruler invoked jihad in time of war it was farz or incumbent on every adult and healthy Muslim male to defend the frontiers and the land of the Muslims (Kakar 1979: 177; Olesen 1997: 68). This scenario was demonstrated within the parameters of the two nineteenth-century Anglo-Afghan wars. It is important to assess the unique role of jihad, as well as the role the religious establishment (ulama), and how the religious establishment perceived themselves as guardians of Islam and contested foreign occupation. In Afghanistan, the religious establishment has been at the forefront of a resistance to foreign domination. From the emergence of modern Afghanistan, the clergy influenced political life as well as religious life.

## Religion and Religious Leadership in Afghanistan

Religious authority in Afghanistan is not ideologically established by the state. Olesen (1995: 38) maintains that in Afghanistan, religious authority is grounded in “scriptural knowledge, sacred descent, and mystical association”. The main religious groups are the ulama (legal scholars), khwajas, pirs and sayids, and the ordinary imams. The sayids are descendents of the prophet Mohammad, and the khwajas trace their ancestry to Caliph Omar.<sup>7</sup> After the death of Mohammad, four individuals succeed him in ruling the community of Muslims. In their social life these two categories of individuals enjoy symbolic value, regardless of whether or not on a personal level the men are men of religion. The pirs serve as spiritual leaders in society and they are accompanied by their disciples (murids). Each region of Afghanistan has its own pir. The pir’s reputation and prestige may be confined to his own locality or it may reach throughout Afghanistan. Traditionally, after the death of a pir, his followers are likely to build a shrine (ziarat) in his honor, and depending upon the prestige of the pir devotees from the surrounding areas and sometimes from far corners of the Muslim world will visit the ziarat. Most pirs are linked to Sufi orders. Sufism or Islamic Mysticism is a continuous and institutionalized phenomenon in the Muslim world and has millions of adherents. In Afghanistan, Sufism is personified in the three orders— Naqshbandiya, Qadiriya, and Cheshtiya (Roy 1980: 38). Sufism has flourished in Afghan society and derives membership from the middle classes in the larger villages and urban centers (*Ibid.* ). Historically, Sufi orders have played a prominent role in

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<sup>7</sup> The Caliph holds great merit in the hearts and minds of Muslims around the world. During Omar’s caliphate (633 B.C.E.-644 A.C.E.), the Islamic Empire grew at an unprecedented rate. Omar is also attributed with the codification of the Islamic Law. Most important, he has won the love and admiration of his fellow Muslims because he lived a modest and simple life. Muslim until the present day rehearse the famous story of Omar arriving in Jerusalem walking behind his camel upon which his servant was seated. Muslims are emotionally attached to the Caliph because of his leadership and governing abilities. In the memory of modern Muslims, Omar lives as a just and kind ruler, not like the leaders of modern times who are known for their abuse of power, people, and the resources of their states.

resistance movements in Afghanistan, most recently in the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

The ulama possess knowledge about Islam and Shariat, and its membership is comprised of the mullas, qazis, and muftis. Kakar (1979:152) asserts that the ulama had the authority to issue fetwas on subjects concerning religion and state<sup>8</sup>. They had an additional role; they served as a protective force against the abuse of power of the secular rulers over the general population (*Ibid*). The ulama possessed religious knowledge learned in madrasas, or Islamic religious schools. The pirs and individuals of religious descent possessed esoteric knowledge acquired through initiation into a sufi order (*tariqat*) or through inherited *barakat*. *Barakat* is a type of religious piety which brings blessings to all who come into contact with it and which originates from certain people places or objects (Roy 1994:37). It is an intrinsic power which may be transferred to others (*Ibid*).

In Sunni Islam there is no organized hierarchical clergy. Furthermore, there is an absence of institutional means either to define or defend religious orthodoxy, or to represent members of the religious establishment as a unified body or to advocate their interests (Olesen 1995: 37). In Afghanistan, religious leadership is defined by local patterns of association and attributes of individual ulama (*Ibid*). However, the lack of centralized structures did not prevent the religious leaders from exerting influence and power at local as well as national levels. First and foremost the, alim or the Muslim scholar does not seek, or is not supposed to pursue, political power as an end in itself. However, the alim has a profound influence on politics. The scholars are obliged to

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<sup>8</sup> A *Fetwa* is an Islamic religious ruling or opinion. It may only be issued by an individual or group recognized to possess untarnished religious authority and sound knowledge of Islamic Law.

make certain that rulers' policies comply with the Shariat and to this end they act as the ruler's counselors, particularly on legal matters (Roy 1990:49).

According to Roy (1990), the ulama's primary concern is with civil society and not the state structure. Regarding internal politics, the rulers are obliged to govern state and society according to the tenets of Shariat. It was also incumbent upon the ruler to secure the boundaries of the state. Hence, the ulama perceived themselves as the legitimate guardians of Islam and protectors of the Muslim millat (nation). The millat can be thought of as a geographical sub-region of the greater umma, or community of the Muslims (*Ibid.*, 18). In fact this is how the majority of Afghans have understood the concept of the nation. An alim is concerned with being informed exclusively by the original scriptures and the practice of Shariat. Theoretically, the ulama's role in society is to bring together the diverse sets of populations and hence, demonstrating the power of the universality of Islam. The ulama utilize the tenets of Islam, thus appealing to the emotions of the umma and forcing a feeling of solidarity in the minds of the Muslim umma although ethnically and linguistically diverse and residing in vast geographic regions of the world.

The Muslim millat or nation is imagined in the visions of the ulama. Anderson (1991: 141) asserts that once a nation is imagined, it can be "modeled, adapted and transformed." This imagination of the umma in Islam is only possible "through the medium of sacred language and written script" (*Ibid.*, 12-13). In Anderson's prominent *Imagined Communities*, he discusses the significance of print capitalism in the development of modern nationalism. Old identities were centered on a common religion and this is where ancient and sacred languages played a significant role. Nationalism, on the other hand, is frequently centered on the modern and

vernacular language. In the Afghan context, it is important to note that historically a “lingua franca” does not exist. This is important because as Yasir Suleiman (2004: 13) articulates, “language is a marker of identity and as a boundary-setter between the in-group (ourselves) and the out-group (others).” Although, there are a number of languages and dialects used in Afghanistan, Pashtu and Dari both enjoy prominence. However, both languages are used by political elites in a manner where one language is anointed with more significance and this elevation of one language as the “authentic” language of the Afghans usurps the role of the other in society.

The strategic elevation of either Dari or Pashtu as the “authentic” language of the Afghans by the political elites is a concerted effort to politicize language. In addition, other categories of elites such as Afghan scholars and linguists go through great lengths to make certain that distinctions are made between the Dari of the Afghans which is very closely associated with Farsi (spoken in Iran). It is not uncommon for groups to refuse to speak the dominant language as a form of resistance. Suleiman (2004: 9-11), explains that the refusal to speak a language signifies the importance of the relationship between power and language. This refusal to use a particular language holds symbolic meaning for the individual and serves to confirm his or her identity. Regarding the relationship between power and language, the refusal to speak a particular language is a concerted effort on the part of an individual or the group to demonstrate resistance against the dominant language. In Afghanistan, the measured and tactical use of language by the elites has on occasion served a source of conflict. Although, Suleiman (2004: 15) reminds us that linguistic conflict is not an indication of conflict between languages or language. Rather, linguistic divergence signifies discord between the speakers of a language. The discord between languages indicates conflict in society, and that language is a tool that is

manipulated by the elites to promote their agendas. In the Afghan linguistic context, the absence of one official language has impeded the development of a modern Afghan “national” identity since there is no “national” language in the true sense of the word.

Arabic remains a sacred language in Afghanistan and to a degree serves to build cohesion between the Afghans internally and links the population to the larger Muslim community (umma). For example, when members of the heterogeneous Afghan society read the Quran, regardless of their identification with any particular language, they read their sacred text in classical Arabic. Hence, they imagine that they hold membership in a larger society one which transcends boundaries. This imagination of the umma is conveyed through the medium of a sacred language and written script. The reference is to the Quran which is written in classic Arabic. For the Muslim umma, the Quran remains the most sacred “written script” and the messages in the Quran have been available to generations of Muslims spanning centuries regardless of geographic location and during a period of time spanning many centuries. When Central Asian Muslims meet South Asian Muslims, they are likely confronted by the inability to communicate in a common language. Regardless of their ethnic or linguistic background, they still have an important frame of reference. Anderson (1991: 13) refers to this point of reference as “ideographs.”

Certainly, a communication barrier exists between these people. Classical Arabic is not unlike Latin, in that the two languages are not utilized in the modern age unless the individual is a scholar studying ancient languages or texts. The other occasion when classical Arabic or Latin enters the experience of individuals is during prayers or ceremonial occasions. It is one thing to memorize and recite prayers; it is another matter to understand the complex grammar systems of

a language. Nevertheless, this form of Arabic is unique in that it belongs to every Muslim equally. Every Muslim has a right to claim Arabic for themselves, and the language does not rest in the control of one particular group. Similarly, when Muslims pray, they converge in groups and they are required to perform the prayers in the same exact fashion regardless, of ethnicity, gender, or class. The recitation of the prayers at the same time, in the same locations—for example, the congregation of Muslims during prayer times holds deep symbolic meaning to the Muslims. In fact, it is this sharing of sacred text such as the Quran passed from one generation to the next generation exclusively in classical Arabic, and serving the purpose of creating a community. It is true that the recitations of the prayers or the reading of the Quran is not understood in the most literal manner by most Muslims. It is incredible that a Muslim may read the Quran, but, in everyday life he cannot read a road sign. This religious literacy is not unusual in a predominantly illiterate society. However the lack of understanding the literal meaning of religious texts or prayers is not exclusively a Muslim phenomenon. Similarly, many Catholics before the Vatican II Council did not understand the Latin Mass, few Orthodox Christians understand Old Church Slavonic, nor are many Jewish worshippers fluent in Hebrew — the language of their religious texts and prayers. It is important to note, however, that ignorance of the literal meaning of religious texts and prayers does not take away from the sacredness of the practices or the ritual. It is only important that the people praying or reading their holy texts believe that they are sharing a unique experience with members of their own group, reading the texts which they believe God revealed for the sole purpose of their group.

The code of universality of the umma conveyed by the ulama entails cultural, religious and historical components. In the non-tribal zones—outside of the Pashtun tribal territories and

rural regions of Afghanistan, they have tremendous influence, and as members of a group that are perceived to be historically legitimate. The ulama have been able to recruit people to jihad against foreign imperialism (Roy 1990:48). The call to jihad has not only been made against foreign imperialism, the ulama have also challenged the governing methods of local political elites and served as a formidable force to hold local political elites accountable. The ulama preach sermons regarding social justice, a universal theme which holds deep meaning for the poor and the disenfranchised. To the disenfranchised and poor peasants of the country, these messages have symbolic as well as practical significance. Justice is a concept that is understood by all whether they are illiterate or a scholar. Also, the Afghans understand that the fundamental tenants of Islam shields the poor and the vulnerable from abuse by their unjust political leaders. Islam gives the poor peasant an opportunity to acknowledge that while injustice exists, it is not acceptable to God, and God grants permission to resist injustice. This empowers the weak and the vulnerable and provides them with the protection from God, serving to comfort them and allowing them the authority, at least theoretically, to contest the proclaimed legitimacy of the ruler. Islam becomes a powerful “weapon of the weak” (Scott 1985) and they may arm themselves with the shield that is Islam. This contemporary view of Islam as a vehicle of political protest is not new. Throughout the history of Islam, the religion has been used by the downtrodden. This is particularly true in rural Afghanistan, where state institutions and bureaucracy have not served to improve the quality of life of the peasants. In the rural regions of Afghanistan, the formal state and its bureaucratic components such as government officials from Kabul are not present.

While the ulama enjoy an honored and legitimate role in the religious, cultural, social and political aspects of the country, they shun active and direct participation in politics. Why were the ulama not able to use the trust of the people and form a powerful political movement? Roy (1990:49) asserts that the nostalgia for the bygone eras which exist only in the imagination of the clergy, retreating into narrow legalism, and perceiving the manifestation of the contemporary world as alien and resting outside the parameters of Islam, all contribute to the failure of the ulama to present a practical alternative political platform. However, this narrow interpretation of the ulama regarding political communities seems unjust. Certainly, the word of God as revealed in the sacred texts remains unvaried; however, the understanding and interpretation of the revelation has varied over centuries and shaped the environment as a result of the sociopolitical and cultural realities. This claim is supported by Olesen (1997: 1), who urges the necessity to acknowledge the differences between discrepancies in politico-theological dogmas and the actual political structure of the Muslim communities.

The alim may allow the government's form to vary. Challenging the state's authority is an option not because the ulama wish to play an active role in politics. The only time the ulama oppose the state is when they perceive that the political leadership is attempting to marginalize the role of the ulama as guardians of Islam or when defense of Afghanistan from external encroachment is compromised. This is the most strategic role of the ulama, serving as the few who can properly protect Islam and raising the alarm to the leadership and to the population to secure the borders of the country.

According to Olesen (1997:36), Pashtunwali was the ideological foundation upon which the Afghan state was formed from the birth of the state until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Pashtunwali is a prominent frame of reference. Furthermore, the state structures and bureaucracy is seen as external to society, and people's loyalty is directly linked with their local communities (Roy 1990:30). Islam's popularity and the recurring themes of social justice, equality, and the ending of oppressive structures and systems, has armed the ulama with the best weapon with which to denounce rulers considered less than legitimate in their eyes. Seyyed Vali Nasr's (2001), *Islamic Leviathan*, examines the role of Islam by both leaders to legitimize their rule, and by revolutionaries to denounce it. Nasr examines the concept of "Islamic Politics" in Pakistan and Malaysia. Nasr argues that the contemporary multiethnic post-colonial state in Malaysia and Pakistan are frequently perceived as less than legitimate in the psyche of citizens of these two states. Islam, on the other hand, epitomizes all that is legitimate. Therefore, the state elites in both Malaysian and Pakistan have strategically attempted to associate the weak post-colonial state with Islam. This pragmatic strategy, employed by the political elites is an attempt to anoint the state with the positive image of Islam.

Islam is the unifying force in the political, social and religious landscape of Afghanistan. The ulama as the self appointed guardian of the faith are in possession of religious knowledge, through skilful use of their spiritual and political potential, achieve and exercise considerable influence, especially during periods of crisis. Senzil Nawid (1997: 583) has organized the ulama in Afghanistan into three groups: 1) the state employed, high ranking ulama, 2) the lower ranking ulama, mostly from among the local mosque functionaries, and 3) the ulama affiliated with Sufi orders, which were independent of state control. The status of the ulama depended upon rank, knowledge, piety, position, and relationships to other important ulama (*Ibid*). The most privileged category of ulama held coveted religious positions and they were directly in contact

and responsible to the central authority. The lower-ranking rural ulama were relegated to the lower religious hierarchy and were independent from the state. Due to the lack of a direct contact to the central government, this group, in its own manner, enjoyed a coveted relationship with the local rural population and hence, exercised great influence on the lives of the local people. Kakar (1979:152) asserts that the members of the ulama are recruited from all categories of Muslims, and are closely affiliated with the people whom they advise on important issues and lead in prayers.

In rural Afghanistan, the mullah is the individual in charge of religious activities such as prayers, presiding over the religious ceremony associated with the birth of a child, circumcision, marriage and burial, children's catechism, and the management and administration of the local madrassas (Roy 1988: 32). For the performance of these services the mullah is financially dependent upon the good will of the local residents. In addition to receiving a stipend from the Afghan rulers, he is financially compensated by the local communities through alms giving and the offer of other goods (Kakar 1979:152). In rural villages, the mullah is usually the only formally educated person. While he may never seek political power, nor achieve political power, he holds tremendous clout in village politics serving as an arbitrator in local disputes (*Ibid.*, 153). On the other hand, the high ranking state sponsored ulama had access to economic powers. In fact, the higher ulama were granted state lands in rural regions of the country and even obtained land in the capital in return for endorsing the rulers' policies. For the rulers, co-option through economic means was a pragmatic strategy towards religious as well as tribal leaders (Nawid 1997; Olesen 1995: 38). Olesen (1995:38) adds that while the tribal leaders had access to economic assets of their own to sustain their independence of the state, the religious leaders were

mainly dependent upon the grants and donations from the general public, from tribal leaders, and from the state.

### **The Clergy and Resistance to Foreign Occupation**

Nineteenth century Afghanistan survived several dynastic conflicts, wars of succession, and imperial rivalries (Nawid 1997:586). These factors combined posed a serious threat to the central government. These contentions weakened the country's infrastructure. The modernization efforts of nineteenth-century Afghan sovereigns to consolidate the state were lost. Previous Afghan monarchs had made considerable progress regarding state consolidation. Important components of reforms that allowed for the evolution of the tribal confederacy to a centralized system included institutionalizing a large modern army, establishing state-controlled civil and military schools, health facilities, improving upon the emerging state bureaucracy, and developing a system of tax collection. In this regard, developing a taxation system was crucial because the emerging modern state required vast funds with which to promote and implement its reforms. The internal and external political dynamics challenged the establishment of a strong central government allowing tribal communities, as well as individuals in the peripheries, to become increasingly autonomous. One of the consequences of this reality was that the power of the ulama the spiritual leaders of the masses increased significantly and they played a powerful role as leaders of civil society.

During the 1839 and 1879 Anglo-Afghan Wars the influence of the clergy expanded as Afghanistan's rulers became immersed in the power struggle between foreign powers (Kakar 1979: 153; Nawid 1997: 581). The ulama responded by calling for a jihad, and the kings'

function in jihad either established his legitimacy to rule or suffer the consequences of being considered incompetent or worse—a heretic. Religious leaders were increasingly called upon to legitimize political authority. During succession disputes, contestants to the throne sought out influential religious leaders to support their claims and undermine their opponents. For example, the coronation ceremonies of new kings illustrate the important role of the clergy (Nawid 1997:583). These ceremonies displayed the power of the clergy vis-à-vis new kings and held vast importance of the social and visible functions of both the clergy as well as the monarchy. The rituals associated with these ceremonies conferred upon the new king the blessings of the religion. The transfer of power would have been possible without the clergy's cooperation; however, the presence of esteemed members of the clergy would serve the best interest of the new king and reduce to an extent opposition from his rivals. Equally important, the ceremonies would assuage the fears of the clergy regarding their status and prominence in the sense that their roles in the ceremonies would confirm that as guardians of the religion, they were blessing the new ruler. The ceremonies established the legitimacy of both the clergy and the king. Furthermore, the clergy played an instrumental role defining the concepts of nationalism and pan-Islamism and challenged the authority of the central government, particularly along the tribal zone along the border with British India (Kakar 1979).

During the nineteenth century Afghanistan became fully immersed in the imperialistic ventures and contentions of Britain and Russia — the “Great Game of Asia” (Saikal 2004:26). British and Russian diplomats and military strategists were aware of Afghanistan's geopolitical strategic location (Dupree 1980: 380; Fraser-Tytler 1967: 80-81; Gregorian 1968: 115-118). The British invaded the country twice in a bid to establish Afghanistan as a “buffer” state. Czarist

Russia did not sit idly as the British embarked on colonial expeditions; they too wished to extend their political zone of influence. Dupree finds it challenging to blame either Russia or Britain for their counteractions in Central Asia and in Afghanistan. Instead, he recommends that the responsibility of imperialism should be divided between the two European powers in search of new territories and natural resources (Dupree 1980:380).

The Russian advances to the south were a cause for serious concern for the British; they feared their control over India was threatened. Likewise, the British progress northwards and the two invasions of Afghanistan, were viewed in St. Petersburg as an attempt by Britain to procure for itself the north of the Hindu Kush and thwart Russian economic gains in central Asia. In the wake of their imperial conquests the progress of the two contending powers eliminated the sovereignty of many independent principalities. (Fraser-Tytler 1968: 81). The British considered annexing Afghanistan into various principalities, and appointing Persia rather than Afghanistan as the barrier to serve as India's defense (Gregorian 1968:330). The disintegration of Afghanistan was considered inevitable. British Prime Minister Disraeli callously asserted that under the circumstances, the British should retain "what was necessary" for the empire, "and dispose of the rest in that manner which would be most conducive to its permanent interests" (G.E. Buckle quoted in Gregorian 1968: 115).

However, the eager policy makers needed to pay attention to the particulars of the country's geography, a landscape covered in mountains and sheltered by nature from the outside world. In addition, the British neglected to understand the internal political dynamics of Afghanistan and in true myopic fashion committed vast resources, and many people, and embarked upon two invasions of the country. Amin Saikal (2004: 25) laments that, through out

most of the nineteenth century, the two European powers were preoccupied with the control of Afghanistan, and that their preoccupation was a result of a heightened sense of paranoia regarding the security of their empires. In reality, Afghanistan was remote and outside their sphere of influence.

### **The First Anglo-Afghan War 1838-1842**

The two Anglo-Afghan wars provide appropriate examples in the study of the political use of Islam in Afghanistan. Until the First Anglo-Afghan War, the Afghans had little direct contact with Europe. Gregorian (1968: 118) thinks it is important to note that at this time the Afghans' contact with the West was limited, and the country's educational system adhered to "strict scholasticism and formalism". There was also the absence of an official policy, either religious or secular, prescribing hostility towards Europeans. Historical accounts indicate that European travelers were tolerated and in many instances the Afghans were hospitable to their uninvited guests.<sup>9</sup> In fact Amir Dost Mohammad Khan and other Afghan rulers employed British and other European foreigners in their armies (*Ibid.*, 119). Until the First Anglo-Afghan War, the isolated Afghans associated Europeans with science rather than with politics. It was not until the experiences of the First Anglo-Afghan War that Afghan attitudes changed. Henceforth Europeans, particularly Russians and the British, were distrusted and considered as enemies.

In 1837, the Russian-backed Persian army attacked the city of Herat (Dupree 1980: 370). While the Persians sought control over the city, a Russian mission headed by Captain Vitcovitch arrived in Kabul to set up business relations with the Afghan ruler Amir Dost Mohammad Khan

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<sup>9</sup> In fact, many scholars reference the remarkable characteristics of the Afghan sense of hospitality or *melmastia*. This is a typical virtue based upon a system of reciprocity and builds alliances. An extension of hospitality is the obligation to provide asylum, *nanawati* to a fugitive.

(Dupree 1980: 371). Britain perceived both the Persian siege of Herat as well as Captain Vitcovitch's mission to Kabul as a preface in a Russian invasion of India through Afghanistan (Nawid 1997: 587). In 1838, Lord Auckland, the British governor general of India, approached Shah Shujah, the exiled Sadozai ruler of Afghanistan (1804-9), and with Maharajah Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of Punjab. Britain solicited Shah Shujah and Ranjit Singh cooperation in a joint military venture against Amir Dost Mohammad Khan (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 106-107; Nawid 1997: 587). A treaty signed in 1838 by the three parties promised Shah Shujah the Afghan throne. There was one stipulation, however — Shah Shujah needed to accept permanent stationing of British troops in Kabul (Nawid 1997: 587). Although, Shah Shujah objected to the terms, and had a different interpretation of his negotiation with the British, he agreed to return to Kabul with the British (Dupree 1980: 373). The British promised a portion of Afghanistan, later known as the North-West Frontier Province of British India to Ranjit Singh (Nawid 1997: 587). In 1839, the British forces moved towards Kabul and installed Shah Shujah on the Afghan throne forcing Amir Dost Mohammad Khan to flee the country (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 112).

The British expedition in Afghanistan, and Shah Shuja's ascent to the Afghan throne was not met with a strong opposition. The situation remained calm until 1841, and it appeared that for the first time in history the British were in control of Afghanistan (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 112). William MacNaughten, the British representative in Kabul, took control of the daily administration of the country, and it became obvious that Shah Shujah, was king only in the superficial form of the word (Dupree 1980: 378; Ferrier 1958: 330). Macnaughten delivered administrative orders through the king, who would then convey the orders in his durbar (court). Many of the tribal chiefs were aware of the British authority and they resented the occupiers.

Notwithstanding the displeasure of the tribal chiefs, the English thought they were in firm control of Afghanistan, and sent back their armies to India. MacNaughten misinterpreted the quiet to mean that the Afghans supported the new administrators. He issued administrative orders that had dire consequences for the Afghans. He introduced the tariff on imported merchandise intended to promote British trade (Ferrier 1958: 331-332; Nawid 1997: 588). The British began missionary activity in Afghanistan by disseminating a Persian translation of the Bible (Ferrier 1958: 334). This activity caused great agitation amongst members of the population.

The British implemented measures to co-opt the Afghan king and weaken his position in Afghan politics. The Afghans despised the proselytizing of Christianity by the British; Afghans did not have any prior experience with Christian proselytizing. It was one thing for the foreigners to occupy the land of the people, and quite something else convert them to a foreign faith and this action was understood as an attack on the foundation of the people.

While British officers were engaged in festivities, the Afghan urban population was hit by inflation. Accompanied by family members and servants, British officers lived in “Kabul in a little bit of England transplanted via India” (Dupree 1980: 384). The British were sufficiently entertained. Horse races, cricket, formal dinners, amateur theatricals, and dancing occupied their time (*Ibid*). The presence of large numbers of foreign troops in the country, triggered shortages and drove up inflation in major urban areas such as Kabul and Qandahar. The Commissariat Department, in charge of a rich treasury had the purchasing power to acquire all the services and goods it required. The Commissariat Department intentionally paid exorbitant prices for the products and goods and thus offered a lucrative financial opportunity for the local merchants to

hide their supplies, in order to maintain the high prices (Ferrier 1958: 332-334; Gregorian 1968: 122). In the urban regions of Afghanistan, people were not able to afford the high prices for the basic necessities of life and many faced starvation. Resentment began to build against the occupiers and opposition to the British began in Kabul and spread to the rural regions of the country. Mosques served as the platforms from which to censure the British for the deteriorating situation.<sup>10</sup> The ulama able to utilize the political and social potential of Islam, refused to read the Khutba in the name of Shah Shuja. The Khutba is a customary prayer said on special occasions, on Friday and during Eid, whereby the mulla articulates the king's name in his prayers. The ulama omitted the mention of Shah Shuja's name in their prayers because they did not consider him a legitimate Afghan sovereign; rather, they saw him as a foreign puppet (Ferrier 1958: 332). The clergy in various parts of the country responded to the foreign manipulation in the affairs of their country. In addition to advocating jihad, they played an active part in the military resistance as well. The members of the clergy took it upon themselves to travel from village to village in order to persuade people not to sell food to the British (Nawid 1997: 588).

The resistance escalated with the return of Sardar Akbar Khan, the exiled son of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan. Akbar Khan killed the defeated Macnaghten and shortly afterwards terms of the British evacuation were signed which specified the withdrawal of British forces from Afghanistan (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 117). The British were defeated and Shah Shuja was dead. Nearly every segment of society and every ethnic group were involved in Afghanistan's

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<sup>10</sup> This is not unusual, because the mosque is the center of any community; it is also the only suitable place to hold communal gatherings. The mosque is used for the performance of the daily prayers and for holding religious rituals addressing the spiritual needs of the Muslims. In addition, the mosque is a political space as well, it is here that men can meet to discuss various issues and exchange news; it is a place where people gather to discuss problems and resolve conflict. Churches and temples also serve important functions. For example, the Catholic Churches in Poland served a similar purpose in the 1980s – a center of opposition to foreign occupation. In that case the occupying force was comprised of Soviets.

armed resistance against the British invaders. The clergy serving at the forefront of the resistance were not only participants and in charge of mobilizing the masses, but they also served as leaders in the war effort. While resentment toward the foreign occupation had united the diverse Afghan forces against the British, religious leaders stood at the forefront of the opposition as defenders of Islam and advocates of jihad. The clergy's demand for a holy war became the most effective means to articulate a defense of Afghan territorial integrity as well as protecting ancient traditional cultures. Through the activities of the clergy Islam was mobilized as a powerful political force cutting across ethnic, racial, and linguistic divisions (Gregorian 1968: 126). Afghan religious and political elites used Islam to mobilize popular opinion and enlist the common folk in their struggle against imperialism (*Ibid*).

In January 1842, British troops retreated from Kabul to Jalalabad. Members of the British garrison were killed by Ghilzai Pashtun warriors as they trudged through the snow. Only Dr. William Bryden, a medical officer, survived the continuous attacks en route through the mountain passes (Fraser-Tytler 1968: 118). This solitary survivor was memorialized in a haunting painting by Elizabeth Butler titled *Remnants of an Army*. After four disastrous years the British left Afghanistan. The first Anglo-Afghan War ended in total defeat for the British. John W. Kaye, the chronicler of the Anglo-Afghan Wars, ends his classic work *History of the War in Afghanistan* saying: "The calamity of 1842...was, in principle and in act, an unrighteous usurpation, and the curse of God was on it from the first. Our successes at the outset were a part of the curse. They lapped us in false security, and deluded us to our overthrow. This is the great lesson to be learnt from the contemplation of all circumstances of the Afghan War..." (Kaye quoted in Dupree 1980: 400). Dupree refers to the First Anglo-Afghan War as a "war of

robbery” launched by the English government by proxy of the Government of India (*Ibid*). This war was a “secret war, waged by people without their knowledge, against another group of people who had not committed an offense (*Ibid*).

### **The Second Anglo-Afghan war, 1878-80**

In the Autumn of 1842, British forces returned to Kabul; they burnt the Kabul bazaar as a sign of retribution and retrieved British prisoners from Bamiyan, in northern Afghanistan (Fraser-Tytle 1967: 119). They knew better than to make any attempt to remain in the country. The British negotiated with Amir Dost Mohammad Khan, and British policy makers found it suited their interests to adopt a policy of non-interference, or “Masterly Inactivity.” Fraser-Tytler (1967:127) asserts that the British policy of “non-interference was at the time both expedient and logical.” This policy allowed Amir Dost Mohammad Khan the opportunity to restore stability to his country, and to maintain control over the far regions of the kingdom. He obtained the title of *zia al millat au din*—Light of the Nation and Faith (Nawid 1997: 592). The title was religiously inspired and established his role as a commander of the faithful—*amir al-muminin* (*Ibid*). The Afghan clergy confirmed upon the Amir the title. The Amir assumed leadership of a religiously sanctioned government and asserted that he incurred the divine right of king and would serve as the shadow of God on earth. In addition, he wrote a number of pamphlets, and distributed them in the Pashtun tribal regions, calling on the Pashtun tribes to resist the British encroachment (Nawid 1997: 592-593). The pamphlets made jihad incumbent upon every healthy Muslim adult male. It is important to note the Amir’s acquisition of the title of *Amir al muminen*. This reverential title was bestowed upon Amir Abdur Rahman

Khan during a time when the title rightfully belonged to Sultan Abdulhamid II, who was the last of the Ottoman Caliphs. The Ottoman Caliphs were respected in the Sunni Muslim world, and their Caliphate held great symbolic power. Historically, the Caliph was considered the shadow of God on earth. Yet, Sultan Abdulhamid II did not resist the Afghan Amir's claim to the coveted title. Perhaps, the Sultan kept his silence because he and the Amir had a similar enemy — the British Empire, and the Sultan appreciated the Amir's efforts to mobilize the Afghans against the British imperialist interests in the Muslim world.

The Second Anglo-Afghan War was triggered by British fears of Russia's encroachment in Central Asia in the 1860's and 1870's (Dupree 1980: 404-406). Prime Minister Disraeli's government reassessed the previous British policy of "Masterly Inactivity" and replaced it by the "Forward Policy." This policy's objective was to advance into Afghan territory, gain control and create a buffer zone or a "scientific frontier" to protect India (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 137; Ghaus 1988: 2; Gregorian 1968: 111). Disraeli's cabinet promoted the Forward Policy and asserted that in Afghanistan, the non-intervention policy was not guaranteeing British interest in Afghanistan, rather, this policy was causing a drift between London and the Afghan king (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 137). In order to accomplish the task of transforming Afghanistan into a buffer state, the Viceroy had the following two options. He could conclude a treaty with the Amir. Or, if the Amir was not receptive to this alliance, the Viceroy would seek to annex parts of the kingdom and replace Sher Ali with a ruler agreeable to British interests and more dependent on British (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 142-143). The previous statement underscores the British disregard for Afghanistan's sovereignty.

The British were presented with a lucrative opportunity. In 1878, a Russian diplomatic mission led by General Stolietov arrived uninvited at the court of Amir Sher Ali Khan (1867-79), Dost Mohammad Khan's son and successor (Dupree 1980:408; Nawid 1997: 589). The Russians clearly responded to the initiation of the British Forward Policy. The Amir's attempt to stop the mission was unsuccessful. The British viceroy saw the arrival of the diplomatic mission as an affront to British interests and demanded that the Amir receive a British delegation in Kabul (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 144; Nawid 1997: 589). The Amir's refusal to immediately accept the demand afforded the British an excuse to invade Afghanistan. In November 1878, British troops attacked Qandahar, Kurram and Kabul (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 146; Nawid 1997:589). General Roberts took control of Kabul and the surrounding areas as well as the country's day to day administration and he ruled with cruel determination and instilled fear in the minds of the local population (Dupree 1980: 409).

The Afghans did not accept the second occupation of their country and they mobilized against the occupiers. In the absence of a strong political leadership, the clergy assumed leadership in mobilizing the populace against the British forces (Nawid 1997: 590). Mushk-I-Alam Akhundzadah (A Ghilzai Pashtun, and powerful religious leader), Mohammad Jan (Wardak, Ismatullah Allah Jabar Khel Ghilzai), Mir Bacha Khan (Tajik), and several other prominent members of society joined forces and formed a large Afghan *lashkar* (Tribal army) that moved on Kabul (Dupree 1980: 410; Nawid 1997: 590; Olesen 1997: 84-87). The response from the Afghan society was impressive in the sense that nearly every member of society participated in the call for the Jihad launched by the Akhundzada. The Akhundzada was famous for his learning and piety, and he was the most influential pir in eastern Afghanistan and reputed

to have more than a hundred thousand followers (Olesen 1997: 84-85). The political manifestations of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, once again afforded the clergy the opportunity to establish for itself a prominent historical role and continue the tradition of mobilizing the masses in the name of Islam against foreign invasions. The clergy perceived themselves as the defenders of the faith, and stressed safeguarding of the land of Islam against foreign invasion and protecting rural civil society — a role with which it was not unfamiliar and one they asserted in times of severe internal or external political upheaval. A common feature among nearly all the religious leaders in Afghanistan at the time was their strong anti-British attitude. The British reinforced the anti-British sentiments of the Afghans by their attempts to expand their empire into Afghan territories.

Nawid praises Mulla Din Muhammad, known as Mushk-i-Alam (1790-1886) as the most important leader of the Second Anglo-Afghan War and attributed to him the Afghan resistance's success. The mullah's reputation as a religious and pious Muslim was known around the country, and he became an important symbol of resistance to foreign occupation (Nawid 1997:590). He declared jihad in Ghazni, his home city, and mobilized people on his way to the north in the direction of Kabul. Despite his age — he was 88 years old — the mullah served on the front lines of a campaign against the British. Similar to the First Anglo-Afghan War, many Afghans, regardless of ethnicity, language affiliations, gender or age participated in the jihad. Women carried supplies to men in the battlefields (Kakar 1979: 172). In Kabul many of the women during the Second Anglo-Afghan War used to take part in battle. An important account held that the Afghan victory over the English in the battle of Maiwand was mainly a result of the encouragement of the exhausted Afghan ghazis (warriors) by a young woman called Malalay

(Dupree 1980: 411; Kakar 1979: 172). The following account of Howard Hensman, the equivalent to contemporary embedded journalist writing for *The Pioneer* (published in Alahabad, India) and the *Daily News* (published in London), wrote:

Nearly every fighting man in North-Eastern Afghanistan flocked to the banners consecrated by Mushk-i-Alam; and if the success of the jihad had been a little longer-lived — say by the interception of our reinforcement — there would have been streams of men setting in Cabul from Turkistan, Badakhshan, and the Shutargardan district. (quoted in Nawid 1997: 590)

The February 1880 jihad led by Mulla Mushk-i-Alam was successful and it prevented British advances to Kabul. The British did not consider occupying Afghanistan and embarked upon a hasty retreat. They were anxious to see who would emerge on the Afghan political scene to assume control of the country. A candidate with whom they could negotiate favorable terms of agreement was important to them. The arrival of Sardar Abdul Rahman Khan seemed to appease them, if only for the moment.

An assessment of the effects of the two Anglo-Afghan wars indicates that the urban centers of eastern Afghanistan were most severely damaged by these wars. Gregorian (1968:126) thinks that this is historically significant. The unmerited invasion of Afghanistan ruined the kingdom. The wars seriously damaged the already frail economy of the country, especially the urban economy. The experiences of the Anglo-Afghan Wars traumatized the Afghans, and won for them a reputation for treachery and deceit which was unwarranted. The urban centers of Afghanistan were devastated, and this devastation has great historical significance in the resistance. Due to the weakened position of the urban zones of the country, the nationalist, anti-British resistance was comprised of Afghan tribes and the religious establishment (*Ibid*). Once the British hold on the urban centers was weakened by nationalist forces the Afghan tribal and

the religious establishment transformed the resistance into a religious war as well as a nationalist war (Gregorian 1968: 126). Islam became a powerful national force, unifying the diverse populations, and used by the Afghan rulers in a bid to mobilize the people and procure their support in the war effort. The Anglo-Afghan Wars has many detrimental impacts on the society, economics, and political dynamics of the country. As mentioned previously, the urban economy was decimated. The population of the strategic cities, such as Kabul and Qandahar sharply declined, and the fledgling military power of the country was left in ruins. Wars bring about countless examples of destruction; however, periods of conflict and turmoil, first, test and then reinforce the survival of various systems and affiliations. A positive outcome of the Anglo-Afghan Wars heightened the sense of nationalism and political consciousness and the Afghans' preparedness to respond to their country's defense from foreign encroachment. However, there were negative repercussions. The transformation of the Afghan resistance into a jihad reinforced the social position of the traditionalist ulama hence making this group a powerful force against state centralization efforts of subsequent rulers. Additionally, the traumatic experiences of the war infused in the Afghan psyche a sense of xenophobia and cultural isolationism (Gregorian 1968: 127).

Fraser-Tytler (1967: 120), explains that harrowing memories of the First Anglo-Afghan War could not be erased, and henceforth, Afghans would treat the European with suspicion and maintain their distance from European thought and knowledge. This attempt at isolationism was so intense, that members of the religious leadership resisted implementation of socio-economic and cultural reforms. They perceived such innovations as contrary with the principles of Islam and Afghan traditions. They associated these reforms with the Christian enemy and European

imperialism (Gregorian 1968: 127). This resistance to the implementation of reforms would impede future progress in the country and introduce other dangerous trends. For example, the contributions of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan sometimes appeared to be in vain. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Afghanistan lacked formal hospitals and medicines. Amir Abdur Rahman Khan founded several modern hospitals in the country (Kakar 1979: 164). The Amir employed Indian physicians, and invited European doctors and nurses to manage these hospitals. However, the mullahs were opposed to modern medicine on religious grounds and questioned the skill of the foreign doctors. In fact Mullah Najim al-Din, who was considered a national hero by the Afghans because of his hostility to the British, accused the Amir of compromising the religious traditions of Afghanistan by bringing Europeans to the country (Kakar 1979: 164-165). For various members of the religious establishment, resisting state sponsored reforms became synonymous with resisting imperialism.

### **Islam, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan and the Policy of Centralization of Power**

The influence of the religious establishment diminished considerably after the end of the second Anglo-Afghan war. When the Amir Abdur Rahman Khan ascended the throne, Afghanistan was weakened by wars and foreign occupation, and torn by inter dynastic struggles for power (Gregorian 1968: 130). During the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, Afghanistan was going through painful process of becoming a nation state and all of this was against the backdrop of the rivalry between two great imperial powers in the region. The internal integration of the country was at a disadvantage by a combination of non state actors such as the religious establishment and the tribal groups.

During this time Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, “the Iron Amir” embarked upon unification and centralization of Afghanistan. These goals were pursued through administrative and economic programs and maintained by strengthening the power of the sovereign (Olesen 1997: 61). Dupree (1980: 417) refers to the Amir’s efforts as internal imperialism. An important component of the Amir’s attempt to claim legitimacy on the basis of Islam was his attempted “Islamization” of the legal system which would give him credibility, or at least neutralize his opponents. This attempt at unification also standardized the legal system in the country (Olesen 1997: 65). Hence, “Islamization” was self consciously pursued as a state policy. He argued that Afghans and their religion could be protected from further Christian influences only by a strong unified government. Popular support for jihad was at its peak when the Amir came to power during the second Anglo-Afghan war (Nawid 1997: 591).

Amir Abdur Rahman Khan appealed to the Afghans’ sense of honor, national dignity, religious affiliations, and patriotism. He sent messages to the prominent tribal chiefs announcing his objective to expel the British from Afghanistan. Kakar (1979: 153) asserts that the strength of the mullahs’ influence in Afghanistan was due to the fact that a significant percentage of the population was illiterate and lacked knowledge regarding the basic principles and tenets of Islam. This situation served the interests of the Afghan rulers who enlisted the support of the mullahs whenever the country was threatened by outsiders. Clerical power was further reinforced particularly during the second Anglo-Afghan War, when several members of the religious establishment emerged as leaders of the resistance and on more than one occasion offered more military opposition to the British than the royal princes or the tribal elders (Kakar 1979: 153). However the popular religious sentiments of the people in favor of the Amir eventually

diminished. British troops evacuated the country, but not without demanding a heavy price from Afghanistan. The United Kingdom wanted control over Afghanistan's foreign policy.

In July 1880 Lord Griffin, the foreign secretary to the government of India, sent correspondence to the Amir. In his letter, Griffin articulated the United Kingdom's position on Afghanistan, stating that since the Amir did not accept the presence of foreign powers in Afghanistan — the reference to foreign powers was the Amir's refusal to accept British representatives in Afghanistan — London expected the Amir to only have foreign relations with the British government (Nawid 1997: 591). Historians report that the Amir never accepted the terms of this agreement. Amir Abdur Rahman Khan was a political pragmatist and he was obliged to concede to the British demands because his kingdom was situated precariously between two hostile and aggressive empires. However, the religious establishment would not accept Amir's rationale. In their views, the Amir appeared to gamble with the independence of Afghanistan. They questioned his commitment to the independence of Afghanistan and accused him of sacrificing the country's autonomy for personal gain — his tenure on the throne (*Ibid*). In 1881, under the guidance of Abdur Rahman, the Qandahar mullahs issued a fetwa, declaring the Amir an "infidel" by associating himself with and acquiescing to British demands (Kakar 1979: 153). After the conflict ended, the Amir reportedly executed the mullah personally. For this act he earned the wrath of other mullahs who refrained from giving him moral or religious support.

As noted previously, it was incumbent upon Afghan sovereigns to rule according to the standards established by Shariat and Pashtunwali. Consequently, it was not unusual for the clergy to scrutinize the political actions and policies of the ruler and either accept them as agreeable to the principles of Islam or dismiss them as un-Islamic and thus unlawful. In the case

of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, the clergy had two grievances against him. One was his authoritarianism and the other was his supposed amicable relations with the British (Olesen 1997: 82). The clergy had the power to assert that the Amir was disobeying the principles of Shariat. Due to his proximity to the British he could have been branded a *kafir*, or nonbeliever — a label that would have sanctioned rebellion against his rule. When Amir Abdur Rahman Khan first assumed power, he inherited a country fragmented from internal strife and devastated by two imperial wars waged over a period of fifty years. The Amir had before him the tremendous task of breaking down the tribal and feudal systems, substituting them with a uniform set of laws. The Amir's preoccupation with "imagine" and "national community" was an attempt to fuse together diverse people to form a coherent "national consciousness" (Anderson 2002: 96-97). The Afghan Pashtun royal dynasty was defining itself in national terms. The invention of the new community required the Amir to break the traditional power of the tribal kingdom. The Amir relocated thousands of Ghilzai Pashtuns and others from south-central Afghanistan to the north of the Hindu Kush (Dupree 1980: 419).<sup>11</sup> The Amir intended to use the army to consolidate his dynasty by eliminating his rivals and establishing an absolute government. By relocating the Ghilzais from their historical place of residence the Amir accomplished two important objectives: he marginalized anti-state elements from regions where they might launch rebellions, and he created a force loyal to him. The politically astute ruler knew that the Ghilzai Pashtun might be anti-Durrani (Pashtun) while living in their own territorial tribal zones. In a different residential context they were Pashtuns first vis-a-vis the northern non-Pashtun ethnic communities: Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkomen (*Ibid*).

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<sup>11</sup> The Ghilzai Pashtuns represented his major rivals. Note that his dynasty was Durrani Pashtun.

In addition to weakening the tribal systems, the Amir found it in the interest of his centralization policies to weaken the position of the religious leaders and embarked upon a policy aimed at limiting the power of the mullahs and bringing them under the jurisdiction secular authority. He accomplished this task by eliminating some mullahs, stopping or reducing financial support (wazifas) of others, and redirecting the wazifas to those who would assist him in furthering his national objectives (Kakar 1979:154). Kakar (1979:154) argues that measures Amir Abdur Rahman Khan took regarding the religious leaders was not an attempt to weaken the position of Islam in Afghanistan, but rather to reinforce the status of Islam in Afghan society and politics and to incorporate the religion into the state apparatus. He deemed that Islam and its religious institutions were the foundation of the state, and the state would control religious doctrines establishing the duties of the Muslim Afghans. For example, the Amir's emphasis on an Islamic social order stressed the most important Islamic tenets, such as giving *zakat* (the obligatory alms tax), taking part in the jihad, and obedience to the ruler (Olesen 1997: 67).

The Amir proclaimed himself the defender and champion of Islam in Afghanistan. He also stated that his right to rule the Afghans was ordained by God. Abdur Rahman assumed the dual role of a leader and interpreter of Islam and Islamic laws, claiming that this step was essential to the preservation of orthodoxy and the true spirit of Islam (Gregorian 1968: 135). In 1893, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan was forced to sign a treaty with the British which came to be known as the Durrand agreement. This accord demarcated Afghanistan's boundaries. The Durrand Line is an example of the British imperial act demarcating political boundaries and dividing cultural communities (Dupree 1980:425). This "culture area" to which Dupree refers is the Pashtun tribal lands divided into British and Afghan spheres of influence. The Durrand Line

dismembered Afghanistan and its inhabitants and introduced a new wave of hostilities against the British and reinforced the political position of the religious groups in eastern Afghanistan (Nawid 1997: 593).

Despite repeatedly stating that he never considered any Pashtun areas as permanently relinquished to the British the Amir was severely criticized for this treaty. The clergy accused him of acquiescing to the demands of the British and compromising Afghanistan's sovereignty. The Amir needed to diffuse public contempt over this accord and he urgently sought public approval through policies demonstrating the religious justification for his authority. The Amir's most famous attempt to use the religious establishment to advance his political schemes was during the conquest of the eastern province of Kafiristan. In 1896, the Amir embarked on a campaign to convert the polytheistic population to Islam. The inhabitants of Kafiristan, who identified between themselves on the basis of their tribes, adhered to a religious tradition that employed idolatry, ancestor worship and worshiped fire (Kakar 1979: 151). In undertaking the conversion of this group the Amir had three objectives in mind: to consolidate the isolated and inaccessible province into the kingdom, to fortify against foreign interference or Christian missionary activities there, and most important to win the support of his people and of the volatile religious authorities (Gregorian 1968: 136; Nawid 1997: 592). The conquest of this province strengthened the Amir's position with the religious establishment, and he was given the title *Ziya ul-Millat wa Din*, or "The Light of the Nation and of Religion" (*Ibid*).

## **Conclusion**

Nineteenth century Afghanistan was a kingdom subject to continued foreign pressure,

intervention and aggression, which resulted in two Anglo Afghan Wars and loss of considerable territory. In addition, the state was beset by several internal problems. The dynastic power struggles within the royal family weakened the central authority and its rulers. In possession of insignificant military capabilities of their own, rulers had to harness the support of the various Afghan tribes and other sections of the population, especially the religious establishment both in their struggles with rival contenders to the throne and to resist foreign imperial designs. Because the Afghan state was evolving from a tribal confederacy to a centralized system, it was important to check the power of the tribal leaders, the landed aristocracy, and also religious leaders.

Historians report that at this time, the Afghans were devout Muslims, and tolerant of other religions. The country's educational system was structured by adherence to scholasticism and formalism, and state sponsored antagonism, either of a religious or secular nature, regarding Europeans did not exist. The First Anglo-Afghan War changed Afghan perceptions, especially towards Europeans. An increase in religious and national anti-British feelings ensued. The British and Russian empires were cast as Christian enemies who threatened Islam and Afghan sovereignty. The continued conflict between the frontier tribes and the British authorities in India, and the general political conditions following the wars, sustained this attitude.

The political realities of Afghanistan were further exacerbated by the fact that the ruler was not an absolute monarch; he was obliged to rule according to the guidelines of Shariat following the tenets of Islam, or Pashtunwali. The Pashtun code of honor also made rulers more dependent upon the will of the elites in society. Because he relied so heavily upon these two systems, the position and the policies of the Afghan king could easily be challenged by the religious establishment and the tribal leaders. Furthermore, internal strife and foreign aggressions

severely challenged the Afghan kings' ability to consolidate central power. Therefore the legitimacy of the ruler and the central power were easily questioned in volatile environment.

### **Chapter 3: The Politics of Reform and Resistance**

The Afghans were devastated in 1978 by the communist coup and again in 1979 by the Russian invasion. These events introduced human rights violations on a massive scale, and led to the destruction of Afghan mores institutions, networks, and property. The Russian invasion occurred amidst a civil war in Afghanistan, and the invasion transformed that civil war into a war of liberation. It gave the liberation war a new meaning, and brought to the forefront the concept of jihad — an expression holding significant meaning in the psyche of the Afghans. The jihad of the 1980s was reminiscent of previous periods of jihad waged against the Sikhs and the British in the nineteenth century. Regardless of previous experiences with jihad, this jihad was the most powerful in terms of its own longevity, retributive mass killings of the civilian population in order to suppress the resistance, and the resources and man power used to engage a superpower. The Russians advanced with a large sophisticated army which eventually numbered 150,000. They were armed with modern weapons, which gave them strategic leverage. The skies above Afghanistan were littered with Soviet warplanes as they attempted to bomb the country and population into submission. The Afghans considered the Russians godless communists, and their ruthless suppression of the Muslims of Central Asia was an example that the Afghans would suffer a similar fate. The Afghans had reason to fear that their land might become absorbed within the Soviet sphere and they would lose their independence.

This fear was further manipulated by the elites of the resistance who made an emotive appeal to the Afghans' love for faith and territory and mobilized the people to join the resistance. External parties such as the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan along with other regional

powers found the Afghan conflict an opportune moment for a super power — the United States to wage a war with its rival, by using the Afghan Mujahidin as proxies. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan found a lucrative opportunity in which the former, in exchange for its delivery of funding the war, would gain extensive opportunities to deliver its ideological doctrine, i.e. Wahabism, to other geographic locations. Pakistan took advantage of this opportunity to marginalize any regime in Kabul and promote the Forward Policy regarding its territorial claims which a colonial legacy it inherited from the British. Pakistan's political elite favored this policy because it advanced their country's geopolitical regional interests. Most specifically, Pakistan was concerned about its own large Pashtun population. Pakistan was ill at ease with the Afghan royal family — the Mohammadzai control of Afghan politics. The Afghan royals were always considered symbols of the country's nationalism and unity. An additional source of resentment and alarm on the part of Pakistan's policy makers was the fear of irredentism via the Afghan governments' support for Pakistani Pashtuns to gain greater sovereignty within a Pashtunistan state. Pakistan had always sought leverage in Afghan politics.

Hence, it was the first hand experience of the civilian Afghan population with the powerful and destructive capabilities of their invaders, the projection of the Mujahideen leaders' articulation for the need to protect land, honor and most important Islam, combined with the manipulation of external elements that allowed the resistance to the Soviet invasion. The resistance was nationwide and every segment of the Afghan population participated. The fate of Afghanistan and its people was at stake, and it became incumbent upon every Afghan to wage a jihad in order to protect fatherland, religion, honor (namoas), and independence. The invasion and occupation shook the very foundations of state and society and participation in the jihad

satisfied the emotional and spiritual needs of the population and confirmed their group solidarity within the community in the face of immense obstacles. Yet the Afghan jihad originally initiated in order to win Afghan independence did not maintain an Afghan identity, and the Afghan “holy” war for independence rapidly became internationalized. Muslims from various countries held on to the coattails of the resistance movement and the cry for Jihad reverberated in various capitals around the world.

The previous chapter explained the importance of Islam as a cohesive force in an ethnically divided society — serving to unify a diverse population against European encroachment. Similarly, during the 1980’s under the banner of Islam, thousands of people were mobilized from various parts of the Muslim world to fight the Communists in Afghanistan. Next to Pakistan’s geographic concerns, the most powerful external parties were the U.S. geopolitical interests. This jihad became a proxy for the United States to use the Afghan landscape and Mujahideen as well as Islamic symbols to rally the fighters in the name of deism and to teach their rivals, the godless Soviets, a lesson. The United States found the perfect opportunity to retaliate against the Soviets, and seek retribution for losses in Viet Nam. Pakistan was able to play a very effective role in minimizing the solidarity of the movement in order to pursue its own regional objectives. Saudi Arabia perceiving itself to be the bastion and vanguard of Islam infused the resistance movement with billions of petrodollars and previously an entity holding insignificant geopolitical prestige became a powerful player in international politics and was able to transport its brand of Islam to far regions of the world. It is important to keep the invasion of the Soviets in historical and political context. In order to do justice to the study, it is significant to highlight several of the important events of the twentieth century which brought about a

conflict between the state apparatus and its elites as well as important segments of the Afghan civil society.

### **The Emergence of a Centralized State**

Chapter Two advanced that during the eighteenth and nineteenth century Afghanistan was an arena of rivalry between two imperial powers. The competition between Great Britain and Russia was referenced as the “Great Game.” Britain conducted two highly destructive invasions of Afghanistan in 1839 and 1879. During both military expeditions, the Afghans were guided in a jihad by traditional leadership such as the ulama and the tribal authorities. The British were defeated in the First Anglo-Afghan War, but the second ended in a compromise. The Treaty of Gandamak confirmed that Afghanistan was a sovereign state. The British government, however, assumed control of Afghanistan’s foreign policy. The Treaty of Gandamak was reversed in 1919 by the nationalist Afghan monarch — Amir Amanullah Khan (Gibb 1987: 367). The Third Anglo-Afghan War achieved the country’s independence. Afghanistan maintained a non-aligned status during the first half of the twentieth century. The previous century’s wars of liberation traumatized the Afghan state and society and subsequent rulers sought a policy based on *realpolitik* of self preservation for themselves and the protection of the monarchy. For example, Nadir Shah (1929-33) pursued a foreign policy of “positive neutrality” and geopolitics based upon reciprocity regarding international relations (Saikal 2004: 102). The king pursued a policy of “gradualism and neutrality” (*Ibid*). Regarding domestic politics, Nadir Shah was an advocate of incremental progress in line with the parameters of Islam and Shariat. He argued that progress, modernization and Islam were compatible. Regarding

foreign policy, the king endorsed policies that were contained and sought to balance relationships with Afghanistan's former aggressors Britain, the newly emerging Soviet Union, as well as extending friendly overtures to Muslim states (Saikal 2004: 102). The king adopted a more "traditional" approach to foreign policy (Ghaus1988: 47; Gregorian 1968: 321). The most important task before him was to make Afghan neutrality pragmatically possible and to convince various parties, both external and internal, that he would not collaborate with the British (Gregorian 1968: 321). In order to secure and maintain the country's independence, the king intended to build a "buffer state" (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 235). It was imperative that the king assuage the fears of domestic elements, because he was well aware that the traditional leadership in Afghanistan was both "king makers and "king breakers." Nadir Shah also needed to be acknowledged as a sovereign of an independent state. Therefore, he needed to convey this message to both Britain and Russia that he was not a tool in their imperialist quests. During the early part of the nineteenth century, the monarch was aware that the independence of Afghanistan was linked to both neighbors continuing to have a reason in maintaining the country's independence.

In the spirit of maintaining a non provocative relationship, Afghanistan needed to impress upon both Britain and Russia the importance of the existence between them of a non-aligned state. The "Great Game" of the nineteenth century was continued and Britain was encouraged to regard Afghanistan as a protective barrier between British India and the Communist military and ideological encroachment (Ghaus 1988: 48). Similarly, the Soviets were to acknowledge Afghanistan as a safeguard against British aggression (*Ibid.*). King Nadir Shah is credited with achieving remarkable progress in the short period of his reign. Fraser-Tytler (1967: 231) admires

him for creating an army of about 40,000 men, quelling three rebellions, constructing a road through the previously impenetrable Hindu Kush Mountains, raising state revenues, making the country's highways safer than they had been previously. The construction of the "Great North Road" through the Hindu Kush was his greatest accomplishment. Fraser-Tytler (1967: 232) refers to this project "as the hallmark of administrative genius" because it was a means of connecting the capital with the northern regions of the country.

Regarding international relations, Afghanistan also sought closer ties with fellow Muslim states, especially Turkey, which invested resources and expertise in the building of Afghan military capabilities. During Nadir Shah's reign, the previously intense search for financial and technical assistance from external sources for development projects nearly diminished. The state budget was supported from domestic funds as were the development projects. The exception to this rule occurred in 1931 when the British Government assisted the king with 10,000 rifles and close to 180,000 pounds (Dupree 1980; Fraser-Tytler 1967: 231). The absence of external assistance was beneficial to the king because it allowed him the autonomy to control in shaping domestic politics, while at the same remaining impervious to outside influences (Saikal 2004: 102). Nadir Shah was aware of the Afghan society's unwillingness, as well as lack of preparedness, to accept reforms at a rapid pace. Hence, he was obliged to adopt an incremental program for development. Due to the meager state budget, Nadir Shah prioritized development projects. Internationally, Nadir Shah sought to mollify the fears of his northern neighbors by abandoning support for the Basmachi rebellion in Soviet Central Asia (Gregorian 1968: 332).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Basmachi was a Muslim and Turkic resistance against Russian rule in Central Asia. The struggle for national liberation forced some Turkestan refugees to seek sanctuary in Northern Afghanistan. In addition to having Islam as a common force, the Northern Afghans also shared ethnic and linguistic ties with Central Asia. The suffering of fellow Muslims endeared the refugees to the Afghan public and they

As an astute political leader, the king was aware that the Afghan government did not have the financial means, or the military capability to quell rebellions to the north of his kingdom. Nadir Shah instead concentrated on addressing the immediate needs of his kingdom. Fraser-Tytler (1967: 230) notes that Ibrahim Beg, the leader of the Basmachi movement used the northern region of the country as base from which to engage the Soviets. The pragmatic King refused to allow his northern territories to be used as a place from which anti-Soviet raids could be launched. Similarly, Nadir Shah distanced himself from the activities of the tribal regions of North West Pakistan (Gregorian 1968: 330).

The King even kept silent on the contentious Durrand Line. The previous chapter mentioned the demarcation of the Durrand Line. It is important to address the conditions that brought about the Durrand Line because its repercussions continue to shape foreign relations between the two countries. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, the British sought to secure a permanent boundary or “buffer state” between their empire and the kingdom of Afghanistan. British fears were related to the anti-British activities of the frontier tribes of the Afghan kingdom who challenged the Forward Policy. The British intensified their military activities against the tribes in the hopes of quelling their resistance efforts extending control over them. However, tribal resistance was increasing and becoming more effective. The British knew that support for the tribes came from the Afghan ruler, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, who had on several occasions incited resistance among the Pashtun tribes against the British (Kakar 1979:

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received sympathy from the local population. However, in order to prevent the emergence of hostilities from the Soviet's, Nadir Khan's government prevented internal support for the Basmachi movement and expelled Ibrahim Beg, a leader of the movement. The king was standing on precarious ground and lacked financial and military support to deal with revolts that might emerge within his territory. He wanted to avoid winning the wrath of the Soviet's possibility resulted in the fragmentation of his own kingdom. For further discussions see Fraser-Tytler (1967: 230), Gregorian (1968: 332-334) and Dupree 1980: 460.

177). Cognizant of the fact that the Afghan King served as a powerful symbol of Pashtun unity the British wanted to permanently sever the ties between the tribes and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan. Britain's policy makers suggested demarcating a permanent boundary between British India and the Kingdom of Afghanistan. This would resolve the issue of contested territories, allow the British to disarm and control the tribes more easily under their authority, and impede the transfer of Afghan agents and weapons to reach the Eastern Pashtuns (Ghaus 1988: 14-15). The Amir was threatened with military intervention and aware that his country suffered in the past from the repercussions of Britain's Forward Policy. He accepted British India's foreign secretary Sir Mortimer Durrand. The Amir was appalled when he realized the extent of the British objectives. They meant to create a buffer zone between Afghanistan and British India, dismember his kingdom and divide his people. The Afghan imagination could not fathom the dissection of the country and homeland of the Pashtuns into two sections — one remaining attached to Afghanistan and the other severed and arbitrarily included in British India. The Durrand Line of 1893 had devastating consequences for the region and the implications are far reaching.<sup>13</sup> Fraser-Tytler (1968: 188-189) concurs that the Durrand Line had few advantages and many defects, and that the demarcation is not supported by "ethnography, strategy and geography" (Gregorian 1968: 321-322). We may infer from the above quote that Fraser-Tytler was referring to both military advantages as well as administrative governance. Indeed, regarding the division of spheres of influence and colonial boundaries, the classic European colonial

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<sup>13</sup> Since 1947 when Pakistan received its independence, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have reached breaking point on several occasions, and Pakistan's foreign relations with Afghanistan dictates the latter country's stance on the Pashtunistan issue. Since 2001, The U.S. occupying forces have been forced to extend their military activities and are currently entrenched in this region.

empires Spain, Portugal, Britain, France, and Holland partitioned along ethnic lines. This policy was considered the norm.

The British coerced the Afghan Amir to agree to the Durrand Line and sought, in the establishment of the artificial boundary, stability to the frontier region. The demarcation of the Durrand Line was considered by some scholars a failure with regards to achieving British objectives (Dupree 1980: 428). The coerced concession of 1893, divided a nation in two, and it even divided several of the Pashtun tribes in half, and it subjected Amir Abdur Rahman Khan and subsequent Afghan monarchs and presidents to internal pressure to readdress the issue (Newall 1972: 48). Dupree (1980: 428) asserts the British plan partitioned villages, and the physical demarcation also divided loyalties with reaching political consequences. In several instances, the agricultural lands of a village lay on the British side while the village and its occupants remained on the Afghan side of the border (*Ibid.*). Even more arbitrary was the division of a number of houses along the Durrand Line. While the house was on the Afghan side of the border, its door would open into British India.

Consequently, the British obsession with topography, rather than the interests and intricate networks of the people, fueled resentment and supported Pashtun nationalism. In subsequent decades, this nationalism projected from the demarcation of the Durrand Line, influencing Afghanistan's policy toward Pakistan (Emadi 1990: 32). In addition, the Durrand Line made Afghanistan into a landlocked country, thus introducing a serious set of problems for the country's economic development, trade and commerce. Landlocked states depend upon the goodwill of neighboring states, most significantly Pakistan. In the words of Louis Dupree (1980:

428) the Durrand Line confirmed that this new state was “politically, geographically, and strategically” not feasible.

Afghanistan’s rulers sought to maintain the country’s independence through a precarious policy of pursuing neutrality by delicately foreign relations. During the early 1930s King Nadir Khan sought peaceful coexistence with Britain and Russia. He sought to establish a relationship with both empires without indicating a preference to neither power. Nadir Khan (1929-34) prioritized the consolidation of the state using the institution of the monarchy as a form of legitimacy. In order to legitimize the state and his rule, the King promoted Islam as the state religion (Emadi 1990: 6).

The King also made use of the religious establishment’s authority to extend control over the tribes (Gregorian 1969: 305). He embarked on a mission to reconstruct and modernize the country (Olesen 1995: 180-183) and he took care to rule with great caution. He cordoned his kingdom off from foreign domination by supporting the state budget from funds within the country. The monarch supported his development programs by pursuing well-measured and calculated development projects. He made attempts to neutralize the influence of Britain and Russia by approaching the United States. He strengthened relations with Iran and Turkey by sending correspondence to Reza Shah and Mustapha Kemal (Gregorian 1968: 333). Turkey assumed a prominent role in the training of the Afghan army and in the health sector (Ghaus 1988: 51). While Nadir Khan refrained from supporting the Basmachi and tribal struggle, he supported a program of Pan-Islamism that was not assertive in nature, and therefore could be misunderstood to threaten Russia and still appeal to the emotions of the domestic elements and Muslims around the world (Gregorian 1968: 333-334). It was important to not only appease

Afghans, but to link them to the Muslim communities around of the umma. In fact, Nadir Khan's appeal to Islam made pragmatic sense: the King presided over an ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous state, and a significant portion of the Pashtun population resided on the British Indian/ Pakistani side of the border.

Group solidarity with the Muslim umma, was important for the pragmatic king. The human desire to become integrated and build "solidarity" with fellow members of the community is significant, because it is this group solidarity which impresses on the individuals to mobilize their efforts and dedicate their energies to a cause (Barreto 2009: 6). Furthermore, we are compelled to participate in the collective struggles of a group only when the psyche has established an impressive emotional attachment (*Ibid.*). In the Afghan context and the context of the Muslim umma, Islam is the most impressive component shared between very diverse populations residing in vast regions of the world. However, it is important for this diverse ethnic, linguistic, and regional assembly of groups to form a bond that transcends national and ethnic boundaries. The formation of this group solidarity is engineered by nationalist leaders who dedicate great efforts to creating solidarity. In an effort to corroborate unity among Muslim states, an Afghan delegation was sent to the Hejaz to establish relations with strategic parts of the Muslim world (Gregorian 1968: 334). Therefore, Nadir Shah's action as nationalist elite is not surprising and confirms that he strategically anticipated that ties with the Muslim states satisfied the emotional and psychological needs of the Muslim Afghans.

The King received support from a number of directions. Turkey's constitutional experts assisted in the preparation of the Constitution of 1931, which remained in effect until 1964 (Ghaus 1988: 51). Fraser-Tytler (1967: 242), asserts that both Iran and Turkey inspired Nadir

Shah assisted its monarch to reestablish law and order and provided the country with a model on which to modernize. The King “in his quiet, methodical, far-seeing way was rescuing it (Afghanistan) in the early thirties from disruption and laying within it firm foundations for the structure of a modern state and for the maintenance of the peace of Central Asia” (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 243). Nadir Shah pursued a policy of “selective modernization” and sought the assistance of industrialized and politically disinterested states such as Germany, France, Italy and Japan (Ghaus 1988: 51; Gregorian 1968: 335). The King states that did not exhibit any geopolitical interests in Afghanistan. In similar vain, the Afghan sovereign was interested in receiving support of the United States in the development of his kingdom. He admired the country’s unrivaled technical expertise, and wealth. Because of its distant location the United States had no imperialistic ambitions in his realm (Gregorian 1968: 336). The King’s administration attempted to curry U.S. interests; however, the U.S. perceived Afghanistan outside of its sphere of influence. In 1921, the government of the United States extended *de jure* recognition to Afghanistan; but it did not pursue establishing formal diplomatic ties (Gregorian; 1968: 335).

On November 8, 1933, Nadir Shah was assassinated during a school prize ceremony. Mohammad Zahir Shah succeeded his father. During his short three-year reign Nadir Khan reunified the country, established a central authority and pacified rebellions. In short, this king laid the foundations upon which a modern state could be built. This was the political legacy that his young son Zahir Shah inherited. Zahir Shah was 19 when he ascended to the thrown. Nadir Shah’s successor ruled until 1973. For the first two decades of his reign his uncles controlled the government as prime ministers (Dupree 1980: 477; Rubin 1995: 58). Zahir Shah became ruler of Afghanistan, at a time when Afghan nationalists and modernists of the 1930s concurred that

Islam, progress, and modernization were compatible (Gregorian 1968: 343). Previously, his father made the same appeal. The nationalists were preoccupied with issues relating to ethnic diversity. The reformers and the thinkers of the period were interested in establishing a common history, religious background, and ethnic origin for the Afghans (Gregorian 1968: 345). It became imperative to present “myths” of a common ancestry. Nationalist elites promote stories of common ancestry in an effort to support ethnic solidarity (Barreto 2009). The elites promoted the notion that while the Afghans are a diverse population the country’s two most prominent ethnic groups — the Pashtuns and the Tajiks — were both the decedents of the ancient Aryans (Gregorian 1968: 345). They also argued that the two official languages Pashtu and Dari derived from the same source. Arguably, this emphasis on the Aryan common root of Afghan identity situates the country symbolically at the crossroads of Central Asia—the heartland of the Turkic people, and South Asia where the Aryans invaded.

Regarding foreign policy, the country’s political leadership continued to pursue a non-aligned vis-à-vis the British and the Russians. The leadership did strive to distance itself from the Durrand demarcation (Ghaus 1988: 55).<sup>14</sup> The Pashtuns residing on the eastern border of Afghanistan acknowledged the Afghan King as their leader in their and many hoped that they would be integrated, one day, with Afghanistan (*Ibid*). For example, sections of the Waziri Pashtuns were led by Hajji Mirza Ali Khan, the Fakir of Ipi who engaged the British several times before World War II (Dupree 1980: 480). The leaders of the Durrand Pashtuns had two options before them. One option was to transform their homeland into an independent Pashtun state, and the other was to merge with an independent and multiethnic Indian state (Ghaus 1988:

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<sup>14</sup> This is a term referring to the Pashtuns residing outside of the Afghan borders.

55). This was something that the Afghans could not control and World War II set the stage for the evolution of country's foreign policy.

The war slowed the country's economic development and in an attempt to alleviate political stresses, King Zahir Shah issued a farman (declaration) asserting his kingdom's neutrality (Dupree 1980: 480). However, Afghanistan's neutrality was tested in 1941, when the British and Soviet governments demanded that the Afghan king expel German and Italian nationals from his country (Dupree 1980: 480; Ghaus 1988: 62; Saikal 2004: 109). A consultative Loya jirga was convened, and the decision to expel the foreign nationals was accepted, with the provision that the Anglo-Russian alliance accept Afghanistan's neutrality and territorial integrity (Ghaus 1988: 62; Saikal 2004: 109). A positive outcome of the war was the establishment of direct diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and the United States. After the war, another important matter impacting Afghans transpired: the British decided to leave India. An important concern for the Afghans was the country's status as a buffer state, and who would fill the political vacuum left by the British, and whether the United Kingdom would resolve the dispute over the Durrand Line (Ghaus 1988: 63). The Afghans had a legitimate cause for concern and were anxious to see the development of their country, and stability in the region. It is true that the British imperialist presence in Asia exploited the people, land and resources of the region; nevertheless, to the local people and rulers they were a constant presence they attempted to manage.

After the war's conclusion, the major goal of the Afghan ruling elites was the incremental modernization of the country's socio-economic systems (Emadi 1990: 29). The political elite were also concerned with how to maintain the internal stability and legitimacy of the monarchy

*(Ibid.)*. In a speech delivered in 1934, the King articulated three points (Gregorian 1968: 375). The first point was his intent to maintain cordial relations with all countries. He expressed his wish to live in peace with his neighbors, and he publicly declared his objective of making certain that Afghanistan was not a source of political problems for other states. In their attempt to consolidate central authority, the royal family fused together several important elements. Newall (1972: 70) identifies these as the royal family, the military forces, private economic interests, particularly prominent landowners and commercial capitalists, traditional leadership such as the ulama and the tribes, and the Western educated professional class.

The political leadership invested in the development of modern armed forces. The development of the Afghan army was critical because it was perceived as the means for achieving and maintaining stability within the country (Gregorian 1968: 370). The political elite advocated enlisting in the army, and mandated compulsory conscription. Popular participation in the development of a modern army was portrayed as a service to Islam and the Afghan nation (Emadi 1990: 30). This was an attempt to introduce in the populace a nationalist consciousness and encourage them to think beyond regionalism. In this regards, the Afghan Ministry of War concentrated on recruiting the sons of Afghan tribal chiefs for the military academy (Gregorian 1968: 371). This was a politically pragmatic move with the intent to train an ethnically diverse Afghan officer corps and impress upon them that by joining the national army, they were sharing power with the monarchy. When the British left India, they also left unresolved the Pashtun issue. Sharing ethnic, linguistic and cultural ties with the Pashtun nationalist leadership Afghans could not ignore Pakistan's stance on the tribal regions (Ghaus 1988: 68). The creation of the North West Frontier Province in 1901 delineated the Pashtun regions from the Province of

Punjab (Dupree 1980: 486). The Pashtun region was then divided into “Settled Districts and the Tribal Agencies,” sparking independent movements among the British Indian Pashtuns (*Ibid.*). In its defense, the central government in Afghanistan asserted that the tribes had separate agreements with the British, and that self determination was their right (Dupree 1980: 486; Rubin 1995: 62). Other states had been offered the choice of joining India, Pakistan, or to remain independent (Gregorian 1968: 371). However, when it came to partition of British India, the Sikhs were left without a separate homeland of their own (Khalistan). Therefore, the British instituted a policy of dividing British India along Hindu-Muslim lines and ignoring all other cleavages. These unresolved issues would lead to the subsequent creation of Sikh majority Punjab state in India and the separation of East Pakistan—Bangladesh in the 1970s.

After obtaining independence Pakistan endeavored to increase its military power in the Tribal Agencies. The Pakistani government arrested tribal leaders, and denied Pashtun attempts for independence (Ghaus 1988: 68). Afghanistan and Pakistan exchanged ambassadors in 1948; however, the relations between the two countries deteriorated (Dupree 1980: 491). While Afghanistan continued to oppose Pakistan on the Pashtun issue, it still needed to maintain an amicable relationship with Pakistan upon which it depended for a link to the international markets through the port of Karachi. Pakistan determined to regularly impede the transit goods to Afghanistan, cause commercial delays, and limited the number of railway cars transporting Afghan goods from Karachi. Frequently the items in transit never reached Afghanistan (Dupree 1980: 491). Pakistan’s political elites resented Afghanistan’s position regarding Pashtunistan, and the political elites in Islamabad, particularly the military elite, used this fear and resentment to shape its policies regarding Afghanistan.

In order to avoid a complete reliance upon Pakistan, the Afghan government sought alternative routes to international markets. Iran was not an option substitute because the eastern part of that country, the region adjacent to Afghanistan was at a financial disadvantage. Soviet Central Asia remained the only alternative. Afghanistan had to rely on the cooperation of the Soviet Union, which it made readily available, albeit for a price. Rubin (1995: 62-65) asserts that Afghanistan became a *rentier* state, and that the state financed over 40 percent of its expenditures from foreign aid and the sale of natural gas to the USSR. Saikal (2004: 117) agrees articulating that under the direction of Premier Daoud Khan, his skill and knowledge of domestic issues and the growing American-Soviet rivalry provided him with the favorable opportunity to expedite modernization programs for Afghanistan. However, because the country lacked extensive revenues which would support the Premier's development schemes, an alternative to internal revenues was the seeking of foreign assistance and this assistance transformed Afghanistan into a *rentier* state linking Afghanistan with the ideology of the USSR and leaving vulnerable the country's development programs (*Ibid.*). The spending of foreign aid was based on a patronage system and the beneficiaries were mainly favored groups (Rubin 1995: 66).

While Afghanistan relied heavily upon Soviet economic assistance, the United States held an emotional appeal for the Afghans (Ghaus 1988: 74). Afghan rulers and the intelligentsia believed that small non-aligned states would benefit immensely from closer association with the United States, especially in the absence of British hegemony in the region. The vacuum left by Britain's departure was noticed by the two Cold War rivals — the United States and the Soviet Union. It was in the best interest of both super powers to encompass Asia in into their spheres of influence. The United States moved quickly and established political, economic and military ties

with Pakistan, Iran and Turkey, rapidly transforming these states into U.S. allies. The incorporation of these states into the Western bloc was further cemented by membership in regional alliances, such as the Baghdad Pact in 1955 and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1958 (Saikal 2004: 118).

Policy makers in Washington were keen on pursuing a policy of containment in West Asia and the United States skillful maneuvering allowed the country at a vantage point over the resource rich Persian Gulf region. This policy in Western Asia replicated the image of the United States policy in Eastern Asia. Certainly, in East Asia the policy was linked to direct military action. The Korean War, the Vietnam War, and supporting the authoritarian regimes against Communist insurgencies such as the Philippines and Indonesia are appropriate examples of this policy. Washington resolved to deny its rival any advantage from the UK's strategic withdrawal from the region. Moscow interpreted U.S. strategic moves as an agenda of transforming South Asia and the Middle East into a region from which subversive activities against the USSR would be launched. David Gibb (1987: 365-366) articulates that during the Cold War two views influenced U.S. foreign policy. One view was that the USSR had a "Grand Strategy" of expanding in the developing world. The second view, advocated by George F. Kennan, perceived Soviet foreign policy as "cautious" as and no more aggressive than the United States or China (*Ibid.*). Both views influenced U.S. foreign policy; however, the alarmist perspective was favored and showed a willingness to shelve détente policies and increase military expenditures. The USSR saw this as a blatant disregard of its geopolitical rights due to geographic proximity to Southern and Eastern Asia. However, in Moscow it was seen as a sign of trepidation that the U.S. was establishing close ties in the region.

European experts did not disregard the Afghan invitation to investigate natural resources in the country's northern regions (Saikal 2004: 119). The Soviet's communicated a stiff reprimand to the Afghan government on 7 August 1952, explaining in no uncertain terms their objection to the presence of experts "belonging to the aggressive North Atlantic bloc" and conveying that if these activities continued Afghanistan would have compromised its "good neighborly relations' with its northern neighbor" (Teplinskii quoted in Saikal 2004: 119). The unveiled threats erupted fear in the minds of Kabul policy makers given that the relationship between the two countries was based on "carrot and stick policy" (Gibb 1988: 367).

The United States began to develop a client patron relationship with Pakistan and bestowed upon it favored nation status and extend to the country military and economic assistance. Perhaps, the United States may have considered assisting Afghanistan, but used the pretext of Pashtunistan as an excuse to disfavor Afghanistan. After all Pakistan was a confirmed ally. According to the United States, Afghanistan appeared to be of little strategic importance. Through its diplomatic channels the United States never indicated that it considered Afghanistan's position on Pashtunistan legitimate.<sup>15</sup> By 1954 relations between the USSR and Afghanistan changed. In order to respond to the establishment of the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement between the U.S., Pakistan and Turkey, the Soviet Union extended assistance to

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<sup>15</sup> The following quote from Assistant Secretary of State, George C. McGhee explains the U.S. position and why Washington did not extend a firm commitment to defend Afghanistan from the threat of Communism:

"An independent Pashtunistan would not, in our view, have been a viable state, and there was no one to pay for it except us. US relations with Pakistan were at this time on the upswing. Pakistan, particularly because of the pressure of its rivalry with India, was courting us assiduously. In seeking aid, particularly arms aid, Pakistan took pains to disassociate itself from Indian neutralism, and promised that its forces would be at our side in the event of Communist incursions into South Asia. They offered for us an attractive alternative to the somewhat truculent Indian neutralism." (Poullada and Poullada quoted in Saikal 2004: 121).

Afghanistan (Gibb 1987: 368). The Soviet Union went as far as to support Afghanistan's Pushtunistan Policy (*Ibid.*).

### **Political Liberalization of the 1960s**

During the middle of the twentieth century Afghanistan was sequestered between two hostile neighbors. To the north was the giant superpower armed with its proselytizing ideology and military might. To the East emerged an arch nemesis, Pakistan, to which Afghanistan was dependent and vulnerable. Sardar Daoud Khan took an autocratic approach to modernization and development and politics in general. When he became Afghanistan's prime minister, he was armed with a strong sense of Pashtun nationalism and a strong desire for a centralized program of accelerated modernization. He settled on three interconnected policy objectives. These objectives are not dissimilar to the policy objectives of previous rulers or subsequent regimes. Saikal (2004: 121) identifies the objectives as: to consolidate power, to initiate and implement social and economic reforms, and to adopt Pashtunistan as the program for an Afghan nationalism. He resolved to accomplish these tasks without compromising Afghanistan's traditional foreign policy of non-alignment and neutrality. In order to realize these objectives, the Premier required financial assistance as well as technical and military assistance.

The processes of modernization on a major scale started in 1956, when Premier Daoud Khan launched the first five-year economic development plan.<sup>16</sup> The Soviet Union provided the funding for the five-year plan (Ghaus 1988: 84). With the acceptance of the Soviet aid and training the Afghan political elite recognized that they were leaving themselves vulnerable to

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<sup>16</sup> Modernization also led to the expansion of education and an increase in the number of students. Hassan Kakar (1995 79), asserts that the total number of students rose from 667,500 in 1970 to 888,800 in 1976.

Russian influences. Did the Afghans have an alternative? The American position held firm that the Afghans would only qualify to receive U.S. assistance if they abandoned the controversial Pashtunistan issue. Afghan policy makers could not agree to this demand. It is important to note that the issue of Pashtunistan was not merely a sentimental matter to the Afghans. Fraser-Tytler (1967: 317) explains that Pashtunistan was a serious matter for Afghans. He argued that to the Afghans Pashtunistan had an important political implication as well — it was an Afghan attempt to impede a Forward Policy by Pakistan. Pakistan inherited the legacy of its former colonial administrator after its independence. The country framed its foreign policy in the context of the British foreign policy regarding Afghanistan. Hence, American blatant disregard for Afghanistan's political, national and territorial integrity forced the Afghan political leadership to seek Soviet assistance. Ghaus (1988: 84) explains that the Afghan decision makers were protective of Afghanistan's neutral and autonomous status, and they presumed that the Soviets would not challenge the independence of a small, Islamic, and nonaligned neighbor. Furthermore, history and topography proved that the mountainous terrain of Afghanistan has rendered military occupation of the country unattainable. Likewise, the same arguments have been used to explain why Ethiopia, alone among traditional African states, was able to resist colonial rule. In addition, Afghanistan had a poor infrastructure, and this combined with rugged terrain made it undesirable to outsiders (Gibb 1987: 368). Political pragmatism forced Afghans to set aside their fears of Soviet encroachment and they accepted Russian assistance in important areas such as economic development, military aid and support for Pashtunistan (Ghaus 1988: 85; Rubin 1995). Foreign aid allowed the governing elites the opportunity to distance themselves from historically traditional elites such as the Pashtun tribes and the clergy. For

example, Rubin (1995: 72) asserts that the state building projects which were supported by foreign assistance made the government autonomous of the tribes, peasants, and the ulama; this was an important factor in country's stability during this period. This does not mean that the prominent tribal components and the religious establishment were neglected. Rather, both parties were given symbolic roles and allowed some degree of autonomy.

The Afghans were not the only pragmatic party in this scenario. The Russians benefited immensely from extending assistance. By establishing close ties with Afghanistan, the Soviets filled the vacuum left by the British and made significant progress in influencing Afghanistan's development trajectory (Ghaus 1988: 85, Kakar 1995: 53). Krushchev reiterated his support for Afghanistan's neutrality and he conveyed that the Russians only expected Afghanistan to continue to maintain its nonaligned policy regarding the two superpowers. However, the Afghans would soon learn that the "Russians think one thing; say something else, and do yet another" (Kakar 1995: 53). Premier Daoud Khan guaranteed that Afghanistan would indeed maintain its nonaligned stance. However, Daoud Khan was a staunch proponent of Afghan independence and expected Afghan's neutral stance to be rewarded. An impressive speaker, he once proclaimed that "our whole lives, our whole existence, revolved around one single focal point—freedom. Should we ever get the feeling that our freedom is in the slightest danger, from whatever quarter, then we should prefer to live on dry bread, or even starve, sooner than accept help that would restrict our freedom"(Gupta quoted in Saikal 2004: 132).

The injection of Soviet aid was not without strings attached. During the 1960s, the Soviets encouraged amenable Afghans, a group of leftists, to organize a political party (Kakar 1995: 53). The emergence of this group and the increase in their political activities was as a

result of the promulgation of the 1964 Constitution which afforded them the political space for their activities. The creation of this new elite would have far-reaching consequences for the country's political development and its neutrality vis-à-vis the two superpowers.

### **The Constitutional Period**

King Zahir Shah's support for the 1964 Constitution was the government's attempt to provide a legitimate framework for modern political development.<sup>17</sup> The promulgation of the 1964 Constitution was preceded by a set of revolutionary socio-political reforms. A significant event in the country's history took place during the 1959 Jeshin, the holiday celebrating Afghanistan's independence. Without preamble, or official announcement, the wife of Premier Daoud Khan, the wives of other cabinet personalities, members of the royal family, and of high ranking military officials appeared in public without wearing a veil (Dupree 1980: 530).<sup>18</sup>

The Prime Minister investigated a number of so called "authentic" traditions to find out its support in Islamic traditions — among them, the "purdah."<sup>19</sup> Dupree (1980: 531) asserts that a comprehensive study conducted by the Prime Minister as well as a set of legal advisors studied the Quran, the Hadith (traditions of the Prophet Mohammad), and the Hanafi

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<sup>17</sup> The 1964 Constitution had precedence in the Constitution of 1923. King Nadir Shah's 1931 Constitution was inspired by Turkish, French, and Iranian sources (Dupree 1980: 464).

<sup>18</sup> While the discarding the veil was significant with respect to social and political reforms in the country, it was not unprecedented. Thirty years previously, King Amnallah Khan also abolished *purdah*, and promoted coeducation in schools in Kabul. The king was an advocate of women's rights and the promulgation of the 1923 Constitution granted women right to vote. For a discussion on the reforms of Family Law and Amanullah Khan's support for feminist causes see Gregorian (1968: 243-244). The *purdah* refers to the physical seclusion of women from men as well as the wearing of an article of clothing similar to a cloak which conceals women from their head to their ankles. In Afghanistan, this cloak was called a *chadoori* and was required of every woman who resided in Afghanistan's urban centers. Rural women were exempt from observing *purda* based on practical reasons, as they were often active in the fields and performing chores alongside men. For centuries, this custom was supported by an "assumed religious sanction" (Dupree 1980: 530).

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Shariat of Sunni Islam, did not find sufficient evidence to support *pardah*. Rather, in the context of Afghan custom, the *pardah* was “invented” rather than an “authentic” tradition and it had a pragmatic purpose of making possible the mobility and propriety of urban women (Hobsbawm and Ranger). Hence, the modernization and social reforms of the political elites challenged important customs which were cloaked in religious sanctions. In reality many such customs were not supported by formal religious sanctions (*Ibid.*). The Prime Minister did receive the wrath of some religious leaders, who accused the Prime Minister’s reform programs contradictory to Islamic traditions.<sup>20</sup>

The 1964 Constitution was introduced amidst a set of social and political reforms and in an attempt to initiate socio-economic change in the Afghan state (Olesen 1995: 206). This constitution played an important role in providing a legal framework that would help political elites appear legitimate in the eyes of the growing middle class. Increasing educational opportunities allowed more Afghans to receive an education as well as facilitating the exchange of ideas and shift people from rural regions of the country to urban centers. The new educated class became vociferous in their demands for political change. The Constitution secured civil rights, freedom of the press, equality of all citizens, and transformed Afghanistan into a modern state (Emadi 1990: 43; Olesen: 1995: 206). However, the weaknesses in the constitution became evident when despite all the promises it made, the King had the ultimate authority to dissolve parliament.

As mentioned previously, the 1964 Constitution was inspired by constitutions in the West. Article 15 noted that the King was responsible for protecting Islam, guarding the Constitution,

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<sup>20</sup> The Prime Minister responded that if the *mullahs* could identify religious justification for the *pardah*, he would return his wife and daughters to *pardah* immediately (Dupree 1980: 532).

and maintaining Afghanistan's sovereignty, protecting the legal systems in the country and the defending the rights of the people. Olesen (1995: 207) argues that despite such declarations, the Constitution was still a reflection of Western concepts and thus not grounded in the political realities of Afghanistan. In addition to its contradictory nature and the fact that this legal framework was informed by foreign political systems, Newell (1972: 98) states that the Constitution could not "inspire" the loyalties of the modern educated and nationalist Afghans. With the passage of time, it was simply ignored by both its authors and its critics. However, it is inappropriate to dismiss the 1964 Constitution; it was developed with the King's best intentions and its weaknesses were not due to any lack of support on his part. The King supported the Constitution because he argued that Afghanistan must join other democratic states of the world. The lack of successful implementation of the Constitution reflected instability in state society, or at least certain segments of society. Such a revolutionary move towards democratization required better preparation of the society. As Olesen (1995: 216) notes, the primary source of contention in society was between the state and civil society, rather, than between different social classes. Regardless of the conflicting political outcomes of this particular legal accord the 1964 Constitution advocated the devolution of power.

The time was ripe for political change and this change was mainly prompted by the differences in perspectives as well as governing methods of two powerful individuals: the King and his Prime Minister Daoud Khan. For example, the King supported the initiation of a multi-party system as long as the parties' political platforms did not contradict basic Islamic tenets and continued to support Afghanistan's constitutional monarchy. Daoud Khan argued in favor of an incremental approach to modernization of state structures and society. The Prime Minister was

Zahir Shah's cousin and he was a member of the first generation Western-educated Afghans. Fraser-Tytler (1967: 316-317) refers to him as "authoritarian" figure and his administration was less liberal than the previous prime minister. An advocate of slow and measured reforms, Daoud Khan asserted that Afghans were not yet familiar with political parties and important advances towards democratization need to begin with one party (*Ibid.*). He envisioned a strong one-party regime where the King would have a "ceremonial" role and where the traditional and historically prominent institution of the "loya jirga" (Grand Assembly) would serve as a "booster" for the leader of the Cabinet (Saikal 2004: 142). Daoud Khan feared that the proliferation of multiple parties at such an early stage of political liberalization may result in clashes between the political parties and bring about chaos that could prove detrimental to both state and society. Daoud Khan envisioned the most important role for the party was to promote political education of the people. This could prepare millions of Afghans for further reforms. Once the people were familiar with the important components of the modern political party system, to make democracy a realistic alternative, then the political establishment would move to the next stage of political liberalization, i.e., the development of a multi-party political system (Ghaus 1995: 95).

Prime Minister Daoud Khan proposed a strict system of reforms for Afghanistan, and he expected that the firm grip of that system would guide the country through the complex procedure and stages of reform and development. His priority was a "smooth and unhampered transition to genuine democracy" (Ghaus 1995: 95). An additional source of conflict between the two leaders was the position of the royal family in Afghan politics. The King was convinced that political liberalization and increased popular participation in governance would require Afghan royals to withdraw from holding various political offices, such as premierships, cabinet posts, or

membership in parliament (Saikal 2004: 133). Daoud Khan objected to this position, arguing that close to 95% of the population was illiterate, and the country could not afford to reject the existing limited skill and talent (Ghaus 1995: 95). The differences were resolved by Daoud Khan's resignation. Dupree (1980: 556) applauds Daoud Khan's decision to voluntarily step down from power, explaining that leaving office was a remarkable feat and in the best interests of the country. Ultimately it prevented a rupture of hostilities between the King and his cousin.

After promulgating the liberal Constitution of 1964 King Zahir Shah took an active part in governing the country. He governed with the support of five successive prime ministers; not a single one was a member of the royal family (Saikal 2004: 134). The advance towards democratization unleashed other consequences, particularly the emergence of the leftist and Islamist groups. In 1965 twenty-eight educated Afghans with leftist political orientation assembled in the home of Nur Mohammad Taraki in Kabul city, and founded the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) (Adamec 2005: 20; Gibb 1987: 369; Kakar 1995: 53-54). The new party was inspired by other pro-Moscow communist parties. Still, its leadership did not ignore issues near and dear to the hearts of ordinary Afghans. Its original name was the Association of National Democrats and the party's founding leaders developed a political platform consisting of national issues such as Pashtunistan (Kakar 1995: 54). Regardless of the party's ambitious claims, this group failed to achieve the support of the Afghan peasants and workers who preferred to align their lives with the principles of Islamic traditions.

In his study, Gibb (1987: 369) concurs that from its inception, the PDPA was inundated by factional disputes, and by 1967 the party fragmented into Khalq (People) led by Nur Mohammad Taraki and Parcham (Flag) led by Babrak Karmal. The split was a manifestation of

personal and doctrinal conflicts. Both successors to the original Association of National Democrats failed to find support among the majority of the Afghan population. During its lifetime, the PDPA pursued its mission to win over the Afghan elite, exert control over the state apparatus and to eliminate any Western (European) influence (Roy 1988: 41). The PDPA lacked popular legitimacy and was subjected to pressure from both state and society. Societal pressure was strong, because the group's policy positions were understood as antagonistic towards Islam and Afghan traditions. As mentioned previously, the Constitutional Period was preceded by developments in modernization, technology, industrialization, and commercialization. The Constitutional Period inaugurated a new era in freedom of the press. The Press Law, which was implemented to protect "the fundamentals of Islam, constitutional monarchy", attempted to create checks and balances and provide complete freedom of the press as creates government regulations (Dupree 1980: 600). Given the vulnerable conditions of Afghanistan's political development, the press made a valiant effort to emerge as an independent social actor, and the PDPA used the opportunity to publicize to the people its political platform in its periodical *Khalq* (People). Its publisher, Nur Moihammad Taraki, asserted that was it was the "publication of the democratic voice of the people" (Ibid., 601). The Afghans publicly reacted negatively. In addition, several members of the Afghan Senate (Meshrano Jirga) were alarmed by the "anti-Islam, anti-monarchy, and anti-constitution" elements in *Khalq*.<sup>21</sup>

Leftists continued to antagonize the population as well as the government. In November 1966, Karmal expressed pro-Soviet sentiments in the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of Parliament). This support for USSR won him a physical beating by several members of the Wolesi Jirga

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<sup>21</sup> Twenty members of the Senate demanded an investigation of the paper (Dupree 1980: 608). The government did so on May 1966, after six issues had come out (Ibid., 601; Kakar 1995: 54).

(Kakar 1995: 54). In 1970 a member of the PDPA paid lavish tribute to Lenin during the commemoration of his anniversary, using words that were strictly associated with the Prophet Mohammad. This caused an outrage among the public as well as the ulama, resulting in protests and rallies throughout the country (Kakar 1995: 54; Olesen 1995: 214). The ulama used its privileged status, and two members of this group the Hazrat of Shor Bazar and Sibghatullah Mujaddidi and Mian Gul Akhundzada of Taghab, sought a meeting with King Zahir Shah and asked him to “restore religion to its proper place” (Olesen 1995: 215). The King was not sympathetic.<sup>22</sup> When the government rejected the proposal, the ulama led by such persons as Mawlana Fayzani denounced the government as well and dropped the name of Zahir Shah from Friday sermons or Khutba (Kakar 1995: 55). This sign of rebellion initiated by the ulama was not unusual. In the past they refused to mention the ruler’s name in the khutba when they found a ruler less favorable to their interests. Afghan politics became intensely polarized and the new democracy introduced by the King showed signs of weaknesses. The parties likely to gain from the polarization of politics were those on the extreme left and the extreme right (Hyman 1984: 58).

The conflict between the leftists and the religious establishment accelerated during the 1960s when both sides accused the government of conspiring with their opponents (Olesen 1995: 216). The PDPA went through a terrible fragmentation in 1967 into four groups (Hyman 1984: 58). For purposes of this study, the focus will be on the main factions of the PDPA: the Khalq (People) and the Parcham (Flag). An important factor characterizing the distinctions of these two factions is that their composition was influenced by ethnic, regional, and social considerations

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<sup>22</sup> Additional demands included beseeching the government not only to restrain the Communists but also to abandon social reforms, including coeducation and the unveiling of women, banning of alcohol (Kakar 1995: 55; Olesen 1995: 215).

(Hyman 1984: 58; Kakar 1995: 58). Anthony Hyman submits two other differences distinguishing between Khalq and Parcham — this was the strategy, and personal rivalry. The Parcham faction was distinct from Khalq in its makeup, the social background of its members, and their views on national policies and matters of morality and general behavior (Hyman 1984: 58; Kakar 1995: 58).

The Parchamis evolved around the figure of Babrak Karmal and they were mainly from cities, members of the upper classes and well urbanized Dari speakers (Saikal 2004: 160). A number of the Parchamis emerged from the landowning, bureaucratic, and wealthy families. Most Parchamis were non-Pashtuns. Almost all Khalqis were generally poor, from rural areas, and predominantly from minorities integrated among the Pashtuns, revolving around Nur Mohammad Taraki (*Ibid.*, 161). Kakar (1995: 58) asserts that for the aforementioned reasons, the Parchamis, unlike the Khalqis, lacked support within Afghan society. The Parchamis were too internationalists and they lacked a nationalist agenda. The Parcham had a more evolutionary approach to politics than the Khalq, and due to other ambiguities in the party's attitude regarding the establishment, the monarchy, they won the title of “the royal Afghan communist Party” (Hyman 1984: 58-59). Both Khalqis and Parchamis were a product of the modern Afghan education systems. Marxism provided them with a base of support, but they developed links through the dissemination of Marxist literature of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Tudeh Party of Iran — mainly in Russian Pashtu and Farsi (Kakar 1995: 58).<sup>23</sup> Relations

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<sup>23</sup> The Parchamis lacked a social base in Afghanistan, and therefore could not be expected to play an influential role in society. Kakar (1995: 59) reminds us that historically, the rural Afghans have been, in times of trouble, more critical and influential than the urban Afghans in shaping political events. This was not unusual. During the nineteenth century, resistance to the British occupations emerged in the rural regions of Afghanistan which then spread to the urban centers.

between the two groups were antagonistic and when addressing themselves to their Kremlin comrades, they went to great lengths to appear “authentic.”

In 1973, Daoud Khan attempted a non-violent coup against King Zahir Shah. In the course of abolishing the monarchy he established himself as the president of the republic which he governed until 1978. The details of this period are outside of the scope of this study. What is most relevant from that period are his methods of governance and his reforms. The coup was carried out with the assistance of the Parchami faction of the PDPA (Gibb 1987: 370; Roy 1980: 74). However, with the progress of time, and as his regime gained strength, he distanced himself from the leftist elements that had helped him during the coup. Conservative elements of society, liberal social forces, and the emerging Islamists did not regard the association of Daoud Khan with the PDPA as a positive sign and they began to oppose both his domestic and foreign policies (Emadi 1990: 76). The internal opposition, political pressures and the possibility of economic assistance from the U.S. and Iran gave Daoud Khan an opportunity to distance himself from Soviet sphere of influence (*Ibid.*, 77).

In 1975, Daoud Khan asserted in a speech in Herat Province that Afghanistan would not allow any type of “imported ideology”<sup>24</sup> and the country would resist the dissemination of any foreign ideas with every effort possible (Ghaus 1988: 190). He went through great lengths to curb Communist influences. However, the split which existed between the two branches of the Communist Party was dissolved, and with the assistance of the Soviet’s the two splinters were reunified. According to Ghaus (1998: 194) the Russians considered the unification of the two

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<sup>24</sup> It was a clear reference to Communism, and it was later reported that the Russians were angered and they realized that they would not be able to influence him. In fact Daoud Khan was to remain steadfast in his resistance to Soviet infiltration until the last moment of his life. During the Communist Coup of April 28, 1978 he was executed along with (30) members of his family.

branches of the party a prerequisite for toppling the Daoud Khan's government. In addition, Daoud Khan was opposed to the Islamists and his coup was followed by the arrest of the more militant volatile Islamists (Roy 1990: 75). The Islamists became a voice of resistance to the Soviet influences. They viewed their faith as a revolutionary ideology with the potential to herald social and political changes (Saikal 2004: 165). The Republic's years were numbered, and it was overthrown by a Communist *coup d'etat*. The Communist coup of April 27, 1978 — also referred to as the Saur Revolution — ended Afghanistan independence. It was followed by the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Emadi (1990: 79) explains that the demise of Daoud Khan's regime was precipitated by antagonism between the PDPA and its Soviet advisers. From 1978 to 1979, the Soviets supported the PDPA. Their support was indispensable to the PDPA, and the USSR provided the PDPA military assistance as well as Soviet military advisors. Gibb (1987: 372) contends that by October 1979 there were nearly 4,000 Soviet military advisors in Afghanistan. Their support was so entrenched that they were supporting Afghan military units down to the battalion level.

The rest of this chapter will address the historical background of the Afghan resistance. It should be noted that the most important reason for the uprising was the authoritarian way in which the new regime imposed its reforms a few months subsequent to the coup. From the early stages, the PDPA was identified with “un-Islamic ways” (Olesen 1995: 275). Losing all legitimacy, the party epitomized all that was contradictory to the parameters of Islam and Afghan traditions as well as a blatant disregard for popular notions of morality. Emadi (1990: 81) reports that the PDPA demonstrated its blatant disregard for Afghan traditions by introducing unpopular reforms, hanging of revolutionary signs and posters, and ordering people to paint their doors and

windows of their houses red. These revolutionary demands resulted in a rift between the party and the population. The PDPA's wide ranging reform policies such as land reform, abolition of debts and mortgages, restrictions on bride prices were ill conceived. Gibb (1987: 371) proposed that the reforms could have served society, but Afghan society was not prepared for such drastic changes. However, the PDPA's failure to implement the reforms had less to do with the "conservative" nature of the Afghans, and more on the fact that in order to achieve their reforms, the party adopted extremely repressive measures. The reforms were initiated at the expense of the execution of thousands of members of the Afghan aristocracy, and drastically reduced the power of the religious leadership, disregarded traditional customs and laws based on Islamic beliefs regarding money, land and religion. Fully preoccupied with the need to succeed in their revolutionary programs, they thought it was in their best interest to "strike swiftly and ruthlessly" before a resistance could be launched (Roy 1990: 84).

### **Resistance Organizations**

After the Saur Revolution of 1978, the Islamist resistance to the PDPA policies and state repressions increased. The Soviets increased the number of their military advisors and military aid eventually launched a full scale invasion of the country. The liberation war or jihad occurred in every corner of the country presenting the Soviets and their Afghan allies with a serious challenge. Tahir Amin (1984: 374) explains the reason for the popularity of the resistance among Afghans was due to the destruction key institutions, communications, industrial centers, utility lines, irrigation systems, hospitals and schools. The jihad against the Soviet occupation was unlike previous nineteenth century resistance movements which were led by traditional elements

of society such as the ulama and the tribal leaders. The resistance to the Soviet invasion crossed ethnic, linguistic and regional lines. Afghan politics had changed, especially since the constitutional decade of Zahir Shah. A significant change was the emergence of an educated class of Afghans at the forefront of politics. Similarly, modernization, education, technology, industrialization, commercialization and general progress in development had transformed state and society and allowed a new and politically assertive middle class (*Ibid.*, 375).

Traditional leaders were not the only ones who saw themselves as guardians of the state and society and their authority was challenged by newly emerging groups. One such group was the *Hizbi-I-Islami* of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who founded a student movement in Kabul University. Since the 1960's members of this group were the first to sound the alarm of Communist infiltrations inside the country (Amin 1984: 377; Edwards 1993: 609). This group was influenced by the *Jamiat-i-Islami*, of Pakistan and the *Ikhwan al-Muslimeen*, or Muslim Brotherhood, of Egypt<sup>25</sup> was born as a response to the infiltration of leftist ideology in Afghanistan. The leadership of the Islamist group perceived Islam as a revolutionary ideology that could be used to reform political social aspects of society (Saikal 2004: 165). Later, during the 1980's this group would declare its preeminence among the resistance groups in Peshawar (Edwards 1993: 609). Other political parties, largely made up of the intelligentsia, emerged in addition to the Islamist groups. Because the political parties were not legal, their leaders used the free press as a conduit to disseminate their views and recruited students to be their activists. During the 1960s institutions of higher educational, such as Kabul University, became politicized. Student demonstrations protested reforms, and voiced their grievances

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<sup>25</sup> It is noteworthy that Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood also was key to the creation of the Palestinian group Hamas.

including their critique of graduate program curricula and for changes in the admission policies (Dupree 1980: 619-623). The demonstrations were a response to the “real inequities in their society as they see them” (*Ibid.*, 619-21). Dupree (1980: 621) elaborates that the students confronting those ideologies — mainly “religious fanaticism and Western materialist philosophies” — were the reasons, they insisted, for existing inequalities.

Following the overthrow of the monarchy and during the *Khalqi* rule, political parties were suppressed. Several leaders of the Islamists parties fled to Pakistan where they were welcomed by that government (Edwards 1993; Roy 1990: 76). Pakistan was quick to accept the Islamist as this was a politically lucrative opportunity for the government of the country. Hence the Islamists were able to carry out their anti-state activities from exile. The Bhutto regime’s unwavering support for the Islamists was not “ideological, but strategic” (Roy 1990: 76). The key to the strategic alliance was that unlike Kabul’s official foreign policy position regarding Pakistan and especially the Pashtunistan issue, the Afghan Islamists did not condone a nationalist ideology. The Soviet invasion prompted the Islamist groups to action. In addition, new resistance movements emerged. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan caused millions of Afghans to flee. The exodus occurred after many Afghan casualties from intense bombardment of villages, booby-trap bombs, ant-personnel mines (Hyman 1984: 187). Nearly six million Afghans sought refuge outside of the country — mainly in Pakistan and a smaller percentage in Iran, with hundreds of thousands displaced internally. Resistance groups emerged in Peshawar, Pakistan. Kakar (1995: 80) asserts that eighty four small and large resistance groups were set up in Peshawar. Two ideologically distinct resistance groups can be identified: one may be characterized as Islamic nationalist and the other subscribing to leftist inclinations. This paper

maintains its focus on the Islamist organizations that opposed the Soviet invasion and offered political platforms for governing the country.

### **Islamic Radicalism and the evolution of Resistance Movements**

Edeny Naby (1988: 787) articulates that the call to aid and use of religious expressions and symbols in times of crisis is an ancient method and is not limited to geographic regions, cultures and peoples. In this sense political elites are not inventing a new ideology. Rather, they are manipulating the existing meaning of various words and symbols that hold importance in the psyche of the people and exploiting that emotive connection of the people to mobilize people and to direct their energies to promote a particular cause. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (2007) assert that political elites “invent traditions,” and that the invention of so-called authentic traditions has significant social and political functions. This is especially true during moments of crisis. How are large groups of populations mobilized especially if the members of a group do not receive material benefits or official recognition for their sacrifices? Barreto (2009) articulates eloquently that the human psyche has a desire for group solidarity and this need makes it possible to join forces with a nationalist movement. Humans do not feel compelled to join every movement; rather, we embark on a collective struggle only when we have a strong “emotional attachment” to the cause. Indeed according to Barreto (2009), it is this “emotional attachment” that can be manipulated by political elites who are at the forefront of the mobilization of a nationalist movement and it is their untiring efforts to create stories of a common and shared ancestry to promote solidarity within the group. Elites may use religious symbols and appeal to the religious affiliations of people as the Afghan Jihad leadership

demonstrates. In addition, elites may emerge from a secular background and promote the myth of a common ancestry within a secular framework.

The people of Afghanistan felt besieged by a super power armed with all of the military might of the twentieth century. The legitimacy of the regime in Kabul was questioned, and the Marxist government and its alien policies were unacceptable to nearly every segment of Afghan society (Amin 1984: 380). This regime instituted radical land reforms which severely diminished the capabilities of the established order. The regime attacked the landed aristocracy and developed rural cooperatives along Communist systems, it replaced the authority of the local traditional elites with the regime's party, and it began widespread arrests, massacres, and executions of opponents (*ibid*). The "social engineering" experiment implemented in Afghanistan compromised the Kabul regime's legitimacy and was doomed to failure. In Afghanistan, religion and established networks of Shariat and Pashtunwali were the stabilizing factors in society. The replacement of traditional leadership by new local elite was unacceptable. The Marxist regime's irresponsible policies were met by resistance that would inevitably bring it down.

The regime's brutality was intense. Tahir Amin (Amin 1984: 380) reports that by September 1979, 30,000 were jailed, and 12,000 had been executed. William Maley (1987: 712) states that the killing of many tribal personalities and village mullahs, created a "blood bath" that fueled antagonisms. In order to subdue the population, the USSR accompanied by the Afghan Communists unleashed its sophisticated and deadly weapons and advanced interrogation techniques on the unarmed population. Their policies were cloaked in the cover of modernizing reforms which would take Afghanistan from an underdeveloped state to one day rival the

progressives and advanced states of the world. The Soviet soldiers' atrocities were most profound in the Afghan countryside, where most of the population of the country lived. The regime concentrated on depopulating rural areas by bombing, crop destruction, and the threat of famine rather than on pursuing other policies which might win the support of the population (Maley 1987: 721). In the words of the late Khalqi commandant of Puli Charkhi prison, Sayed Abdullah: "a million Afghans are all that should remain alive — a million communists. The rest we don't need. We'll get rid of all of them" (Edward R. Girardet quoted in Maley 1987: 721). Eyewitness accounts explain the mournful and tragic events of large families perishing in bombings, and whole villages being destroyed within a span of a few hours. The cities in Afghan were not spared. The early months of the occupation was witness to thousands of members of Afghan professional and educated classes abducted from university campuses, offices, and their homes. Taken in groups of thousands to the infamous Puli-Charkhi prison on the outskirts of Kabul, where they were held in captivity and eventually executed.<sup>26</sup>

In the face of such insurmountable power and brutalities of the foreign soldiers, depicting that of the biblical story of David and Goliath, Afghans made use of these atrocities to find comfort in their faith. Islam was crucial to individuals and society; both relied upon Islam to sustain the spiritual needs of the population and to strategize a war of liberation. Hence, words such as jihad (holy war), Mujahid and Mujahedeen became integral everyday vocabulary (Naby 1988). It should not be surprising that Islam played a political role in a country experiencing social and political fragmentation (Edwards 1993; Naby 1988; Roy 1980). The war with the

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<sup>26</sup> Local Afghans claim that the earth in the prison area is reddish in colors, and that this hue is a result of the thousands of *shahids* (martyrs) who were brutally dispatched during the ten years of the Soviet occupation. It is quite possible that the color is a result of the various mineral deposits, but, to the locals, the place will most likely serve as the symbol of Afghan tragedy and the resting place of thousands who perished during the conflict.

Soviet Union was not the first attempt by Afghans to defend their territory against foreign powers. Nor was the resistance to the Soviets the only time the Afghans engaged in a jihad. Nawid's (1997) study outlines the nineteenth century wars of liberation waged with the assistance of the ulama, the tribal leadership, and the Afghan monarchs. The response to the Soviet occupation was an evolution of a new Afghan nationalism, a realignment of ethnic associations and new organization of political alliances (Naby 1988: 789; Roy 1990). Anthony Hyman (1984: 197) notes the emergence of new leadership, and the need for meritocracy rather than monopoly of traditional leadership.

A significant outcome of the ten year conflict was the emergence of an Islamic ideology that compelled many across the world and specifically across the Muslim world to contribute funds, weapons, and man power to the resistance. Certainly, the contributions from the non-Muslim world were impressive. During the 1980's, the Reagan administration spent hundreds of millions arming the Mujahadeen for its own ideological purpose (to make war against the "god-less" communists). Interestingly, the non Muslim powers also played the Islamic card, asserting endlessly, that the Mujahideen were indeed "holly" warriors, and their success against the "god-less" communists inevitable. Roy asserts (1990: 233) that the Afghan jihad is the only example in the contemporary Muslim world, where a liberation war was mainly fought by peasants in the name of Islam. Regarding the internationalist components, the term "Arab Afghan War" was coined. The Arab "Mujahideen" arrived in Pakistan — members of the conservative Wahhabi and Muslim Brotherhood affiliates and Wahhabi clerics.<sup>27</sup> Arab teachers, missionaries and

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<sup>27</sup> Wahhabism is an example of Islamic revivalistic movement. The father of the movement was Mohammad ibn-al-Wahhab (1703-92) who was educated in Mecca and Medina. He dedicated his energies to preaching against the moral laxity and spiritual stagnation of his times. He set out to reform society, and offered a panacea to reverse the ills existing in society. Salvation required a return to the

fighters to Pakistan and Afghanistan were selected, funded and channeled through Saudi organizations, like the Red Crescent and other outfits (Roy 1990: 233). This policy of funding and recruitment was encouraged by Saudi Arabia in order to battle the Iranian Shi'I influences. Roy (1990: 233) asserts that in this manner, the strategic programs of the Saudi policy accommodated its religious commitments: to fight "kafir" — Communists. Saudi Arabia became a political opportunist and attempted to play a prominent role in the politics of the region. Certainly, Saudi Arabia's importance as the epicenter of Islam (Mecca & Medina) is noteworthy. Also, the al-Saud family defeated the Hashemites who were direct descendents of the Prophet Mohammad. Therefore, it made strategic sense for the Saud family to link itself with the Wahabis in order to bolster their Islamic credentials in the face of their less-than-sacred blood line and use the conflict in Afghanistan to its political advantage. In this context, the role of the United States cannot be underestimated, because the politics of the Cold War integrated Wahhabi Saudi Arabia, the protection of Pakistan's interests vis-à-vis Pashtunistan, and the United States coerced the various groups into a global order. The U.S. channeled weapons and funds, the Saudi government infused the war effort with the massive funds acquired from their

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practices of the time of the Prophet Mohammad. In particular, he denounced the practices of Sufism, explaining that such practices were corruptions of Islam. Sufism was an ascetic, mystical movement that developed during the early centuries of Islam. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it gained popularity among the poor and the disenfranchised. The appeal of Sufism was in its simplicity, making Islam available to many. Sufism had political implications as well as it became a very effective missionary movement, and Islam spread rather quickly especially in the case of South Asia. The reformers, particularly, Mohammad ibn-al-Wahhab chastised Sufism. He argued that practices of Sufism diverted Muslims from "pure" Islam, and attributed the decline of Muslim societies. Mohammad ibn-al-Wahhab called for a literal interpretation of the Quran and the *Sunna* (the compilation of the traditions of the Prophet Mohammad). In order to reverse the current negative trends in Muslim society, it was argued that a return to the application of Islamic Law in terms of political life, and reforms in the society was necessary. For further discussions on the history and background of contemporary Islamic revivalist movements see Esposito (1991), Mitchell (1993), and Roy (1994).

oil rich resource, and funneled this through their surrogate, Pakistan to administer to the parties they found favorable.

Certainly, the United States had its own regional and international objectives to accommodate. Washington pursued a counter interventionist policy against the Soviets. The United States was guided by its rivalry with the Soviet Union and pursued its own self interest rather than bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan (Saikal 2004: 204). Washington did not think past the Soviet invasion of the country, or what would transpire in the country after the Soviet withdrawal. The United States provided \$625 million in aid to the resistance (Emadi 1990: 114). The lack of genuine concern for Afghanistan as well as its own the long-term policy objectives was evident in both in the United States policy objectives and the distribution of weapons to the Mujahidin (Saikal 2004: 204). Pakistan also pursued a policy perceived to guarantee its self preservation. In this regard, Pakistan supported the Pashtun Islamists because most of the Pakistani official from the military secret services (ISI) or members of the Pakistani Jam'iat party who were responsible for dealing with the (Roy 1990: 230).

Furthermore, the strategy of the Pakistani military was to use the Pashtunistan issue against any central authority in Kabul recalling the old British colonial policy of dealing directly with the tribes, through bribes and the delivery of weapons. Pakistan exerted resources and strategies to impede the efforts of nationalist and pro-royalist groups. The former King was the "living symbol" of Afghan national unity peace (Hyman 1984: 186). Pakistan's policy makers did not find it in their best interest to promote the symbol of Afghan-Pashtun nationalism. Thus they favored Pashtun Islamists, who were mainly from the Ghilzai or Eastern Pashtun group as opposed to the Durrani Pashtuns who were the rulers of Afghanistan for the previous 250 years.

The government of the United States and Pakistan supported Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and provided him weapons and other logistical assistance. The great infusion of weapons, cash, and attention on their proxies however did not necessarily mean success for the various parties. The great irony that Rubin (1995: 279) points to is that the transfer of weapons and funding did not mean that Afghans could be converted into “reliable agents”.

As mentioned previously, the core of the resistance movement was from the Islamic groups. These were diverse in the sense that some were traditional and others supported revolutionary perspectives in the structure and organization of the movement, ideology, and platform. Amin (1984: 380-381) identifies two types of resistance in Afghanistan. He classifies one as spontaneous, and uncoordinated, the other based in the educated middle class for its leadership. The organized resistance was a result of the development of the modern ideologies during the Constitutional experience of Afghanistan’s (Amin 1987: 381). For example, in previous resistance movements, traditionalists such as the ulama and tribal leaders engaged the foreign occupiers. Religious leaders were at forefront of resistance movements and they would sanction the jihad, citing Islam and tradition to bolster their claims.<sup>28</sup> As a rule, the people led the war and the religious figures sanctioned and blessed the war, the first group offered the fighters and the material resources and the latter exerted spiritual power (Kakar 1995: 140). As noted earlier, the official religion of Afghanistan is Sunni Islam which does not have an established and hierarchical clergy. The anthropologist Frederick Barth explains that “among the Afghans, Islam has never been the basis for a permanent, formal hierarchical religious or political organization” (quoted in Kakar 1995: 141). Still, as Barth notes, Islam is a “unifying symbol and emotive force.” The symbolism and the emotional attachment of the Afghans make

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<sup>28</sup> see Nawid 1997, Olesen 1995, Kakar 1995 and Roy 1980.

possible a glorious war waged in the name of traditions and religion and the preservation of Afghanistan.

The status of the ulama changed during the twentieth century. The resistance to the Soviet invasion and occupation marked a significant change and evolution of traditionalist resistance movements. During the previous century and well into the 1930s the political influence of the spiritual leaders who had mobilized the population to resistance against “illegitimate” rulers, both internal and foreign diminished. Members of the ulama as well as other traditional elements were subdued by the state. This cooption culminated with the new 1931 Constitution, and officially concluded the role of the traditional religious establishment in Afghanistan (Olesen 1995: 193). The 1964 Constitution, gave the religious establishment symbolic status and, later Mohammad Daoud Khan curbed the authority of the religious groups, placing several of them in prison. Hence, by 1979, this group had lost their important function as intermediaries between the government and the people (Kakar 1995: 141). At the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, this group was relegated to a symbolic role. In their absence resistance was launched by non-traditionalists and members of the Islamist groups that were the product of modern education systems in Afghanistan.

With the disruption of the political systems in Afghanistan, the old traditionalist did not have the same social base or financial clout. Amin (1987: 382) presents the advantages of the Islamist groups: they initiated an armed resistance against the Daoud Khan government and acquired potent legitimacy by the time of the Soviet invasion. They had trained armed cadres, recruited members from the educated and professional classes, had better organizational structures, and networks in Afghanistan and the support of Pakistan’s *Jammat-i-Islami* (*Ibid.*). In

addition, the Islamists were able to use non-traditional venues in order to gain support for their cause. For example David B. Edwards (1993: 610 ) explained how the nascent organization — originally an underground campus study group — used various resources and existing networks to reinvent itself into a “powerful, highly beauraucratized, and authoritarian political party.” Edwards cites the importance of the relationship between texts, ideology, and political participation, and the effective use of these components to convey ideological assertions (*Ibid*). The manner in which the messages are conveyed, the use of terminology and powerful symbols is crucial because it impacts how the statements from political elites are received and understood. In order to mobilize the population the messages of the political elites needed to be presented in a context that would hold emotional and spiritual meaning to the people.

The young Islamists were offering an alternative to the existing state and society. In order to win the appeal of the population, they needed to resort to the use of select terminology and create a picture of an alternative community in the imaginations of the people. In fact Benedict Anderson (2006) is another scholar who has studied the role of novels and newspapers in the importance of providing the methodological means that is required to imagine a special kind of imagined community, a nation. Anderson refers to “imagined linkage” of a novel or a newspaper and the audience (*Ibid.*, 33). Anderson articulates that the possibility of imagining the nation is a recent phenomenon in human history, and that it was only possible when important cultural concepts lost prominence in the human psyche. The loss of credibility of the ancient systems based on fatalism needed to be replaced, with a viable way to conceptualize “fraternity, power and time” (*Ibid.*, 36). Hence, the importance of print capitalism allowed large groups “of people to think about themselves and, to relate themselves to others in profoundly new ways” (*Ibid*).

The development of this new form of “imagined community” compelled people to realize that while they had cultural ties, these ties could also serve to create bonds between themselves. To reiterate Edwards (1993) assertion, the rapid growth and development capabilities of the *Hizbi-Islami* was linked to the strategic use of the political discourse and practices of the leadership. The Islamists saw themselves as the avant-garde, centralized, disciplined party whose members are connected by a common ideology (Roy 190: 81). To this end they published pamphlets, news papers and other publications. Emadi (1990: 97) identifies a list of publications that was used as a conduit to disseminate Islamic views: *Mardum* (People), *Gahiz* (Morning), *Nida-e-Haq* (Voice of Truth), and *Afkar-e-Naw* (New Thought). The main objectives identified in these publications were to impress upon the leadership in Kabul to Islamicize the state institutions and to challenge the regime in Kabul regarding the “un-Islamic” policies in Afghanistan. The Afghan Islamists strategic use of political discourse and dissemination of their ideology was effective and they were able to expand their appeal by disparaging the traditional leadership or the ulama and branding the traditional elders as “feudal and reactionary” (Kakar 1995: 141). The Islamist party was a modern concept effectively integrating active politics with religion, and far removed from the worldview of the traditional ulama.<sup>29</sup>

Again, the views presented by the traditionalist and the non-traditionalist groups proposed two distinct and contradictory conceptions of political action (Roy 1990: 78). The non-traditional were revolutionaries proposing to reform state and society within an Islamic framework. Their objectives were two pronged. One was to resist the foreign invasion, and the second to reorganize the state and society. The reform of state and society was to be strictly

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<sup>29</sup> The previous chapter discussed that the *ulama* perceived their most important role as the guardians of Islam and the faithful; they did not wish to procure an active role for themselves in politics.

informed by Islamic ideology. They argued that Islam is a complete code of life, providing guidelines for political, social and economic systems (Amin 1987: 385). Furthermore, they understood Islam to be compatible with modern technology, modernization and progress (*Ibid*).

### **Genealogy of the Afghan Islamists in International Perspective**

The leaders of the Islamist groups were inspired by various thinkers of the modern Islamic world, particularly thinkers from Muslim India, Pakistan, and Egypt (Amin 1987: 386; Kakar 1995: 80). Fundamentalism in this context should not be confused with Christian Fundamentalism. For example during the second half of the nineteenth century, Muslim thinkers attempted to address within the context of Islam the backwardness and lack of progress of the Muslim world (Mitchell 1993; Roy 1994: 32). This quest for knowledge was precipitated by the understanding of reformers that most of the territories and people of Islam were politically, economically undermined by, European colonialism. This state of the Muslim world had deep psychological and spiritually meaning for Muslim reformers and many blamed the apathy of rulers and subject alike regarding the guiding principles of Islam. The primary reason of this supposed corruption was the Ottoman Sultans. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Empire was slowly losing territory to a host of separatist movements and it was known as the “Sick Man of Europe.” The movement which addressed the lack of progress of the Muslims was called salafiyya, the “return to the ancestors,” and the authors on the topic were Sayed Jamaluddin Afghani (1838-1898), Muhammad Abdu (1849-1905), and Rashid Rada (1865-1935). They advocated Islamic reform as a pre-requisite for the the development of Muslim communities (Esposito 1991: 63). The most prominent amongst these thinkers was Sayed Jamaluddin Afghani, whose anti-imperialism,

expressed in Islamic terms makes him a symbol of resistance and reforms in the Muslim world (Mathee 1989: 156). His disciples called him the “Socrates of Islam” (*Ibid.*). His influence was most profound in Egypt where his impressive knowledge of the West’s scientific accomplishments is attributed as the reason for his ability to resist Western imperialism as well as to recommend reforms. He argued in favor of modernization and reform of state and society finding Islam as an inspiration to inform the reforms. In his public speeches he reasoned with the Muslim populations of British India and Turkey to awaken to the social, economic, political, scientific and technological decay in their environments and release themselves from foreign domination.

Afghani’s influence on modern Islamist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood is well documented and acknowledged. Afghani attributed the loss of decline and loss of prestige of the Muslims to stagnation and blind imitation that weakened the ability of Islam to address changes in the world’s political and economic systems. Afghani and other subsequent reformers argued that due to the weakened state of the Muslim community, the Europeans invaded their lands and left the community in ruins. Muslims should take responsibility for participating in the destruction of their own communities. According to them, the present Muslims lived in jahiliyya (ignorance) and it was ignorant state of existence which caused them and their lands to become colonized by the Europeans. Afghani and Abdu were in agreement with Rashid Rida (1865-1935) and the support for the importance of the application of Shariat.

Roy (1994: 33-34) explains that Salafist thought was preoccupied with the “reconstitution of the Muslim umma, and in particular with the restoration of the caliphate”.<sup>30</sup> During the latter

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<sup>30</sup> Regarding the importance of the *umma* in the imagination of the Muslims and the prestige of the caliphate see chapter 2.

part of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was severely fragmented and rife with internal weaknesses and foreign influences. However, the Salafists regarded the empire as a best defense against European imperialism and a starting point for the reconstruction of an umma or the “imagined community” of the Muslims. They argued that Islam was comprehensive and self-sufficient, and that the fundamental sources of Islam — such as the Quran and the Hadith provided a complete code of life (Esposito 1991:65). While the Salafiyya never became a political movement, it left its influence on all twentieth century fundamentalist reformist movements (Roy 1994: 34).

In the Afghan political context, as well as elsewhere in the Islamic world, Islamic fundamentalism — Islamism— is defined by scholars as the response to a society in transition from traditional patterns of development to modern ones (Kakar 80; Roy 1990; Roy 1994). In the Afghan context, the most important concern of the Islamists was to protect Muslim Afghanistan from atheism. This atheism pervaded the select segments of the Afghan educated class after the 1950s economic assistance from the Soviets.<sup>31</sup> In order to bring about favorable reforms, the leftist groups directed their focus on feudalism, capitalism, imperialism, and to some extent Islam. The leftists challenged Islam by questioning the existence of God, and leftist students became active in their propaganda efforts on the Kabul University campus. The activities of the leftist groups were challenged by other students and professors who laid the foundation of the Islamic movement in the 1960s (Emadi 1990: 97). These individuals prepared pamphlets and began their own campaign to educate the population regarding the views of Islamic thinkers

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<sup>31</sup>Kakar (1995: 80) states that one of the repercussions of the economic dependence of the country on the Soviet Union was the emergence of leftists influenced by the various publications of the Tudeh Party of Iran, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the Communist Party of China.

through translations of their works and the presentation of numerous pamphlets (Edwards 1993:6). It is first important to elaborate on the views of the Islamic thinkers.

### **Characteristics of Islamism**

The Islamic movement in Afghanistan was a political movement, and the primary concern of the Islamists, not unlike other revolutionaries, was power. The Afghan Islamic movement was informed by the vision of two prominent thinkers one from Indo-Pakistan, and the other from Egypt (Olesen 1995: 231). These individuals are Abdul Ala Mawdudi (1903-79) and Sayyed Qutb (1906-66).<sup>32</sup> Mawdudi and Qutb are contemporaries from the middle of the twentieth century. Their writings were inspired by the Quran and they addressed the importance of reforming various components of state and society such as law and politics. The Islamists have an ideal society in mind, according to Qutb. The early Islamic state of Mohammad and the first four Caliphs constitute such a society and is worthy of emulation (Esposito 1991:136). They acknowledge God as the source of sovereignty, and his commandments found in the Quran are the laws of Islam. Transforming state and society to Islamic alternative requires strict adherence to the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad (*Ibid.*, 137). According to Sayed Qutb, Islam is a complete system which addressing all of the issues that concerns as Muslim in this world and the hereafter (Qutb 2000: 44-45). Qutb articulates that Islam is a universal theory and that social justice in Islam is of paramount importance, and should be understood as “comprehensive human justice extending beyond economic justice and includes

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<sup>32</sup> Sayyed Qutb is considered a devout Muslim. He attempted to offer a model to his followers by attempting to overthrow the socialist government of President Jamal Abdul Naser. Before he was able to, he was seized by the Egyptian authorities and condemned to death in 1966. His writings and revolutionary methods revitalized Islamists throughout the Muslim world inspired them to establish political organizations to achieve the same purpose.

all “sides of life, and all aspects of activity” (*Ibid.*, 45). The importance of adhering to Islamic principles is because of the existence of religious ignorance or divergence from jahiliyya, the “original Islamic model” (Dekmejian 1985: 12). This term is a reference to the condition of pre-Islamic society, a combination of “ignorance and savagery” (Roy 1994: 41).<sup>33</sup>

The Islamists consider the state to be an instrument of reform. In this regard, Maulana Mawdudi advocates a state that is universal in nature — the reference is to the umma — transcending ethnic and geographic boundaries, is based on an Islamic ideological foundation (Esposito 1991: 282). In Mawdudi’s vision, the primary aim of the state is to determine an Islamic ideology based on the two important sources of Islam — the Quran and the Sunna, the sayings or traditions of the Prophet Mohammad. Similar to Sayed Qutb, for Mawdudi, an important characteristic of an Islamic state is the application of Shariat. Mawdudi does not separate “between life-spiritual and life mundane” (Mawdoodi 1990: 1). Mawdudi’s writings define this type of state as an Islamic state and he stresses the importance of Islamic Law. He explains the fundamentals of Shariat, by asserting that primary objective of divine law informs the foundation of a life informed by ma’rufat (virtues) and the rejection of munkarat (vices) (Mawdoodi 1990: 17). Hence, it is important to understand what is permissible that which is conducive to the growth of an Islamic society and that which is prohibited and therefore an impediment to growth and progress is defined by Islamic Law. Sayed Qutb denotes this type of state as an “Islamic order.” Esposito (1991: 282) and others advance that that the demand for “Islamic order” is not simply a call for implementation of a more “Islamically” defined way of life in Muslim states. Rather, “Islamic order” defines the relationship between politics and religion, and is a reference to the ideal development of an Islamic state in which religion and

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<sup>33</sup> Islamists assert that contemporary Muslim societies have regressed to the pre-Islamic state of *jahiliyya*.

politics, economics, and law as well as relevant social components is integrated (*Ibid*). Again, the reference is to the ideal social, political and economic order which existed during the early years of Islam. The predominant theme asserted repeatedly in the writing of Qutb (2000) identifies Islam as an inclusive term and contends that it should be synonymous with the term nizam (order) complete with meaning and pertaining to all aspects of life, such as an individual's personal faith, ethics, and the role of law in society.

According to Mawdudi, the state should be managed by those who accept the ideology of Islam, and Shariat should be used for administering such a state. The ideal Islamic state is governed by a "pious" ruler who uses the Quran as blue print on which to administer the state. In this context the Quran is the constitution. Roy (1994: 42-44) explains the significance of the leader (Amir) and that of the advisory council (shura). Islamist theoreticians conceptualize the future Islamic state as well as the political party on the above concepts. The Amir is both the political leader as well as the religious leader of the Islamic community. Is the Amir appointed or elected to this position? Roy's (1994: 43) detailed analysis asserts that in literature, the search for the ideal Amir is frequently described in terms of the strong characteristics and qualities of the leader. An ideal leader is a Muslim, male; an adult, healthy, and most important must have participated in Hijra (*Ibid*). The performance of the Hijra is compulsory, because it means that he has sought actively to separate himself from the corrupt society and joined a pure society. Again, the reference is to the building of a pure community of Muslims. In order to escape persecution as well as separate himself from the hostile environment, the Prophet of Islam also performed the Hijra along with the early community of Muslims, he escaped to Yathrib (Medina) located to the north of Mecca.

Regarding the question of state power, the modern Islamists actively seek political power. This is so because the Islamists movement is not led by clerics, but by young intellectuals. Please recall that the Afghan Islamist movement was founded by Kabul University professors and the membership was recruited from the university campus (Emadi 1990: 97; Roy 1990: 71-72; Olesen 1995: 235-236). These individuals openly claim to be “religious thinkers” instead of rivals of or successors to the ulama who they perceive have been co-opted by the state and thus compromised their legitimacy (Roy 1994: 36). To the Islamists the state is of great importance, and therefore its capture is one of their primary goals. In order to achieve this end, jihad is perceived as a “continuation of God’s politics by other means” (Kakar 1995: 83). In this context, since jihad is waged against non-believers as well as against unjust rulers who refuse to govern according to the principles, it becomes a permanent political struggle. Mawdudi (1990: 80) and Qutb (2000: 156) anoints jihad as one of the most important religious responsibility, arguing that it is the obligation of every Muslim man, particularly when their religion is under assault. There are several types of jihad. As Mawdudi (1990: 80) articulates that jihad is “exerting oneself to the utmost to disseminate the Word of God and to make it supreme, and remove all impediments in the way of Islam, be that through the tongue, or pen or the sword.”

The means by which political power is attained is significant to the Islamists. The Islamists perceive their role in society as revolutionary and their religion as “revolutionary ideology” (Kakar 1995: 84). The Islamists are not overly concerned with a democratic processes. They disregard a modern democratic process, because democracy is dismissed as an exclusively Western concept. And the second reason supported by Qutb is that the common people are unreliable and easily manipulated.

### **The Islamic Movement in Afghanistan**

The Afghan Islamic movement is a response to modernization programs that led to increased state intervention in society and caused the state to evolve from a traditional a modern entity. During the early decades of the twentieth century, Afghan political elites initiated socio-economic reforms that would separate Islam, politics, and the state (Emadi 1990: 96). These elites used the state to limit the power of the traditional establishment such as the feudal landlords, and the religious establishment. However, the state intended to marginalize the influence of the religious leadership not Islam. Hence, Islam remained a state religion. The ruling classes sought protection in Islam and promoted it in order to legitimize their rule (Emadi 1990: 96). Nasr (2004) argues that politically pragmatic elites use Islam as an effective ideological strategy to gain legitimacy and to mobilize populations. This pragmatic strategy is employed by the political elites in an attempt to anoint the state with the positive image of Islam.

As mentioned previously in the chapter, the state modernization activities mainly financed by the Soviet Union increased during the 1950s. The modernization programs expanded the state's bureaucratic systems. Many people, particularly the students and the professional class participated in the modern sector through schools, courts, economic activity, communications, and the army (Kakar 1995: 85). Urban immigration occurred and during the process of modernization, the Afghan middle class, made up of the educated groups increased from a few hundred to nearly one hundred thousand. During the 1960s, the newly educated class made demands for broader political participation (Newall 1972: 69). This new intelligentsia came from rural regions of the country and benefited from state education systems. This allowed

hardworking students from rural areas to have access to institutions of higher learning in Kabul. However, the state was not able to provide employment for many of the new graduates and the modernization process marginalized segments of society by creating a new class of disillusioned individuals (Emadi 1990: 96).

The leaders of the Islamic movements were from rural Afghanistan and trained within the modern educational systems, not traditional madrasas. The primary objective of the Islamic movement was to persuade the government to “Islamicize” the state apparatus and stop the activities of the leftists (Emadi 1990: 97). Roy (1990: 73) explains that until 1972, the small cells were interested in “spiritual growth and not the pursuit of power.” An additional characteristic of the leadership of the Islamic movements was that these individuals were not members of the political ruling elites, nor were they dependent on the state for anything more than their education. According to Kakar (1995: 85), this may account for their radicalism. In order to provide an alternative to the influence of the revolutionary and communist activities in Afghanistan, a number of professors of Islamic studies at Kabul University who advocated an Islamic way of life organized the *Sazmani Jawanani Muslumanan* known as the Muslim Youth Organization of Afghanistan (Edwards 1987: 6).

Professor Ghulam Mohammad Niazi was one of the founders of the Islamic movement in Afghanistan. Kabul University served as the primary recruitment place (Edwards 1987: 6; Emadi 1990: 97; Olesen 1995: 235). Olesen (1995: 235) states the significance of the recruits from technical and science programs of the university. In the Kabul University modern science was taught separately from social, historical, and philosophical programs. Due to the educational background of the students they incorporated “progress” and “technological development” into

their programs for change, arguing that these features were compatible with Islam. The student branch of the Islamist movement was founded by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in 1969, under the name of the Muslim Youth (*Jawanan-e-Musiloman*), and they published a pamphlet, *Who Are We and What Do We Want?* (Kakar 1995: 86). David B. Edwards (1987: 611) explains the importance of print in the dissemination of their ideology. The party produced educational material that informed the public of the party's ideology. Pamphlets played a significant role in articulating the party's evolution (*Ibid.*). The movement used the texts to explain its position articulating their twofold objectives: to liberate the people of Afghanistan from the injustices of the ruling elite and to bring about a renaissance in religion. Hekmatyar elaborated that the aim of the movement was "the overthrow of the ruling order," replacing it by an "Islamic order" (Nizam), and applying Islam in political, economic, and social spheres" (Kakar 1995:86).

The Islamists articulated that Islam provided a complete and comprehensive system to the Muslims. Similarly, republican forms of government as well as general elections were rejected because they were found to be corrupt. The political teachings of Sayyed Qutb and other revolutionary thinkers of the Muslim world, especially leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, influenced the students (Olesen 1995: 229). The young Islamists traveled to the countryside, and they used their holiday periods as opportunities to preach in their home villages (Roy 1990: 73). They tried to introduce reforms in everyday life and linked reforms with the principles of Islam.<sup>34</sup> Foreign professors teaching at the madrassa as well as Afghan professors who studied at Al-Azghar also played a role in the dissemination of the views of the Islamists.

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<sup>34</sup> For example, Roy (1990: 73-74) reports that the young Islamists reform program used terms employed by nineteenth century reformers to rationalize measures supported by Islam. Roy provides the following examples: ablution was presented as a hygienic act rather than a form of piety; this helped them to spread

The suppression of the Islamists began; some were killed and others including Professor Niazi, were arrested. The rest, including Ghulbuddin Hekmatyar and Rabbani, found sanctuary in Pakistan (Emadi 1990: 98). They were financed by the Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan under the leadership of Maulana Mawdudi. However, they were deeply divided and from 1973 to 1978 they failed to bridge their ideological differences to form a unified party (Amin 1984: 384-85; Tarzi 1991: 481). In addition, the parties did not propose a realistic alternative to the country's development programs. Emadi (1990: 101) states that the Islamists did not address important issues such as land distribution, national oppression, and in particular women's rights. An additional factor which led to their fragmentation and disunity was the influence of the host states, Pakistan. Pakistan avidly began to finance the Afghan dissidents. Furthermore, on July, 22 1975 the Islamists waged an uprising and attacked government headquarters in Badakhshan, Laghman, Logar, and Panjsher (Kakar 1995: 89; Olesen 1995: 274). Kakar (1995: 89) identifies this as a crucial moment because the attacks signified a rebellion against the central government as well as their role in politics. The Islamists were ill prepared for such an endeavor because they did not enjoy the support of the Afghan army, nor did they have sufficient weapons or finances (*Ibid.*).

Rather than unite, the Islamic Movement fragmented into several groups. The split also revealed ethnic and regional tendencies (Tarzi 1991: 486). In addition the internal divisions led to the inability of Peshawar-based leaders to create an inclusive government (*Ibid.*). Tarzi (1991: 487) asserts that the disunity among the commanders made it nearly impossible to develop a military strategy necessary for successful military operations against the Kabul government.

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health education. Another student in the village of Ri-Jang, Balkh Province, set up a cooperative providing peanut seeds. These are examples of social progress promoted by the Islamists.

These regional tendencies would continue to haunt the resistance movement and impede any progress regarding unity and the establishing a political platform as an alternative to the Kabul regime. Deepest contentions were between the *Hizb-i-Islami* and the *Jamiyyat-i-Islami*. The *Hizb-i-Islami* was dominated by the Pashtuns (Amin 1984: 382-383; Saikal 2004: 211-212). Hekmatyar received the patronage of Pakistan, along with the largest supply of arms as well as other foreign aid (Saikal 2004: 211-212; Emadi 1990:102). The *Jamiyyat-i-Islami* of Barhanuddin Rabbani was dominated by ethnic Tajiks, and absorbed regional tendencies such as Panjsheri, Badakhshi, and Herati (Amin 1984: 383). The crystallization of these regional and ethnic tendencies became more pronounced in the latter years of the resistance. Regional and ethnic affiliations compromised the Islamic ideology, which disregards such deviations. Emadi (1990: 103) confirms that during the nine years of war, leaders of the Islamic parties failed to eradicate personal and tribal cleavages that exist among them or to cooperate with each other. Tarzi (1991: 488) corroborates that none of the leaders in the resistance was able to transcend the Pashtun versus non-Pashtun divisions. The Islamic parties posed as each other's staunch rivals and served to fragment the country into fiefdoms, and isolating portions of the country as well as the various groups of people.

The Islamic movement consisted of certain groups that provided a view on the realities of state and society. The groups were loosely structured, and lacking in socio-political platforms, they cannot be identified as political parties. The groups were based upon prominent themes in society relating to traditional and religious concepts, and received membership from diverse persons. The Islamic movement was comprised of the country's ulama, community and tribal

elders, the intelligentsia, army officers, and former government employees. These groups were compelled to join forces in order to wage the *jihad* against the foreign invaders.

### **The Challenges of Unity**

The success of the Afghan jihad depended on a united resistance. This demand was brought to the forefront by the Afghan refugees who held meetings in Peshawar in 1980 (Kakar 1995: 96; Roy 1990: 122). The meetings intended to address important matters such as the unification of the Afghan nation, issues relating to the resistance organizations, liberation of Afghanistan from foreign domination and the Kabul regime, and the formation of a single political leadership (Kakar 1995: 96). The meetings in Peshawar lasted for three months and assumed the characteristics of a *loya jirga*, attended by tribal leaders and leaders of the Islamist organizations. However, the coalition building was not successful. The polarization of the parties corresponded with deep splits in Afghan society; the split was characterized as having sociological and ethnic rather than ideological foundations (Roy 1990:123). Clashes between the Mujahideen leaders and commanders deeply disillusioned the Afghans. The political scene did not change, and the Islamists continued a pretense of unity (Roy 1990: 124). Furthermore, foreign patronage, especially from Pakistan challenged coalition building. The coalition was formed exclusively from Sunni Muslim groups approved by Pakistan. Pakistan's support was very important. The military Inter-Service Intelligence and Afghan Commissionerate were conduits through which Pakistan distributed weapons, cash, and other assistance.

Pakistan only supported the Afghan jihad when it could manipulate it to serve its own political interests. As mentioned previously, Pakistan adopted a client patron relationship with

the resistance, identifying Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Ghilzai Pashtun, as their favorite (Saikal 2004: 210). In fact the ISI had focused on him as the individual who would one day become the head of a post-Communist government in Afghanistan (*Ibid.*). Similarly, President Zia al-Haq of Pakistan was an advocate of the jihad, and influenced the resistance with the objective of grooming the future leadership of Afghanistan to be subservient to Pakistan. Due to this reason, Pakistan opposed the emergence of a strong Afghan leadership. The most effective manner of preventing the formation of such a resistance was a “divide and conquer” policy, which the government of Pakistan pursued. Pakistan was concerned about its own large Pashtun population, and this apprehension was combined with the presence of the Pashtun domination of Afghan politics, and successive Afghan governments’ support for Pakistani Pashtuns to forge a Pashtun state.<sup>35</sup> It is important to note, the close affiliation the Afghans had with their former king. That nostalgic appreciation augmented during the harsh years of brutal foreign occupation and life in exile. Zahir Shah was unlike other Afghan monarchs who may be characterized as unusually autocratic. Kakar (1995: 105) identifies the King as a “mild ruler,” and famous for dedicating ten years of his rule to establishing an unprecedented constitutional democracy. During a period beset by divisions, violence, and anarchy, Zahir Shah was resilient in his stand for unity, accommodation, construction, and cooperation. He seemed to provide a panacea for the pains the Afghans were suffering.

Both Pakistan and the Islamist organizations opposed the King and his recommendations to set up a national front. Again, Pakistan’s primary concern regarded the Pashtunistan issue, and the government in Islamabad was opposed to a movement that would assist Afghan nationalists rise to leadership (Kakar 1995: 104). The Pakistani security services went through great efforts

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<sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Abdul Samad Ghaus (1988: 109-147).

to discourage those groups and individuals who advocated a role for Zahir Shah (*Ibid.*). Pakistan became a police state for Afghan refugees and their activities were heavily monitored. Quelling dissent was crucial for the government of Pakistan and the 1980s proved to be a bloody decade for Afghan refugees living in exile in Pakistan. The leadership in Pakistan made every effort to undermine the resistance and keep it divided and ineffective (Amin 1984: 398). The government of Pakistan and the ISI were complicit in the target assassination of Afghan intellectuals, tribal and community elders and prominent members of the Afghan civil society. Any persons or group who offered an alternative in this sense a nationalist perspective on the jihad or opposed foreign interference such as Arab and Pakistan's role was eliminated. The foreign supported coalition was not successful in managing military activities. In addition, they did not utilize the knowledge and training of the military officers of the Kabul regime who defected and moved to Peshawar. Community and tribal leaders and members of the intelligentsia were deterred from working for the jihad. The Islamists were opportunists and by marginalizing the efforts of others, they hoped to gain exclusive ownership of political power and to Islamize the society (Kakar 1995: 93). The Islamist parties were also in charge of the administration of the millions of refugees.<sup>36</sup> They failed in the capacity of administering the millions of Afghans. Frequently, they resorted to

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<sup>36</sup> The government of Pakistan left them to deal with the refugees. This created a set of problems, because the refugees lived in inhumane conditions. They depended upon the Islamic groups for food rations and other social and health services. Afghan women and children shouldered the biggest responsibilities of life in exile. Because male members of the households were engaged in the resistance, the women were left to become heads of household. Afghan society, characteristic of any other patriarchy, anointed males as heads of household. In the absence of males, women assumed this new responsibility to which they were not accustomed or prepared. Hence, Afghan women became the primary caretakers and bread winners of their household in a foreign and inhospitable foreign land. Nor was the conservative Afghan society prepared to accept women in this new role. In order to receive rations, households needed to be registered under a male name. In the event of a prolonged absence or the death of male heads of family, the women were not able to register their families with aid agencies and they along with their children and other vulnerable members of the family were left bereft of any assistance

tighter control and discipline, and treated the refugees harshly.<sup>37</sup> Kakar (1995: 93) notes that some groups even had courts and prisons and opposed national identity.

## **Conclusion**

The central government's efforts to modernize state and society were challenged by society. Similar to reform programs of developing states, the pattern of development in Afghanistan was not implemented at the grassroots level. Rather reform was initiated by bureaucratic elites who ambitiously attempted to transform the economic, political, and social environment at a rapid pace without first creating a solid base of support. The Afghans experienced the benefits of a number of positive developments in education, liberalization of politics, the advent of a constitutional monarchy, freedom of the press, and general social progress. However, the state could not assume financial responsibility for development programs, and progress improved the lives of small segments of the population while social dissatisfaction grew. In order to gain legitimacy the ruling class used Islam and promoted nationalism in order to neutralize radical elements of the left as well as the Islamists. In addition, the state relied on foreign aid to finance development projects. The search for foreign aid occurred during a highly polarized Cold War. The conflict between segments of society within the state apparatus and their reliance upon the superpowers as well as regional powers for aid, both military and financial contributed to the war's continuation.

The years of war brought a transformation in state and society and proved detrimental for older generations of Afghans. A new generation was trained in the refugee camp environment of Peshawar to assume leadership in Afghanistan. History would prove that this new generation

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<sup>37</sup> Kakar (1995: 93) notes that some groups even had courts and prisons and opposed national identity.

would take part in the political and social developments of the country. The nine years of Soviet occupation did not succeed in aiding the Kabul regime to consolidate power, nor did the efforts of the United States help the Peshawar based Islamists parties to unify and promote strategies that would benefit the diverse elements in Afghanistan. The foreign governments involved opposed the emergence of a national leadership because each pursued their own specific agendas in order to dominate Afghanistan. To this end and until the last days of the resistance, these governments supported the most radicalized of Islamist group such as the *Hizbi Islami* to the detriment of other groups. They wanted to guarantee the right not only to influence the jihad, but to be part of the development of a future political leadership. The Afghan Islamism of the 1980s did not offer a new model for society, and the Islamist political elites attempt to mobilize the people around the myth of a return to an Islamic authenticity which only existed in the imagination of the elites.

## Chapter 4: Cultural Politics?

The argument presented in earlier chapters would appear to lend credibility to Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* thesis, as well as offering support to the Political Culture school of thought. Within this approach, some scholars argue that nationalism is like a primordial urge that instinctually emerges from our genetic makeup. Cultural variations they suggest, informs both cooperative behavior within a particular group as well as providing the impetus for intergroup conflict. This paradigm has certain limitations. The main criticism launched against this school of thought is that the approach is culturally biased at its core as well as culturally deterministic. Bernard Lewis claims, for instance, that Islam is deficient and opposed to universal values. In fact, the use of the term Muslims is often criticized as a stereotyping device that strips Muslims of all other identities. The exclusive use of the term is an implicit assumption that millions of the world's diverse Muslims have the same visions, similar likes and dislikes, and that they supposedly think in the same manner. These assumptions are derived from the abovementioned scholars as well as Western governing elites whose members are frequently ignorant about non-Western cultures. Indeed, it may be argued that sometimes they know even less about their own. It is a universal rule that all societies lack homogeneity and Islamic societies are no exception.

Contemporary Islamic civilization is as diverse as any of the world's other civilizations. Muslims are geographically dispersed across five continents. Islam, especially Sunni Islam, is further subject to ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian differences. Muslims are governed by a variety of political systems and they live in places where their faith has roots as old as the Prophet

Mohammad or as new as those formed in early twenty-first-century America. Furthermore, Muslims' access to education, health care, employment, public services, and the rule of law varies around the world. Diversity in thought and practice does not only exist across international borders, but exists within state parameters as well. Afghanistan is an appropriate example of this heterogeneity that exists within Muslim societies. The most prevalent divisions and subdivisions relate to economic distinctions, however, within Afghan community. Differences between rural/urban, literate/illiterate also exist. This diversity extends to the social, political, and economic environment.

With respect to religion, one should make distinctions between the popular religion of the everyday Afghan and the Islam of the state in Afghanistan. Roy (1988) asserts that the popular Islam is distinct from the Islam of the ulama. The general population finds meaning and comfort in everyday practices — prayers, receiving religious blessings on their birth, death, and marriage ceremonies. The religious authority in this context is the village mullah. He is, perhaps not worldly and he is frequently illiterate, but he is closely associated with the inhabitants of rural Afghanistan. The other authority on Islam is the group of the ulama who are concerned with the legal interpretations of the religion and application of laws. During particular intervals, and with the blessings of the ruling power, the Afghan ulama have enjoyed considerable political, religious and social power in Afghanistan (Nawid 1997). These religious personalities held considerable power during movements of political upheaval, especially during national crises when the country was under aggression by foreign powers. Their power extended over the decisions and actions of the population, as well as the manner in which those populations interpreted and understood domestic and international events. At other times, the power of the

clerics was kept in check by the state. The most precise example is the conclusion of the Second Anglo Afghan War when Amir Abdur Rahman Khan reigned over the power of the ulama — either executing the mullahs, or imprisoning them. Kakar (1979: 154) asserts that the measures the Amir took was not an attempt to weaken the position of Islam in Afghanistan, but rather a strategic move to reinforce the status of Islam in Afghan society and politics and to incorporate religion into the state apparatus. Does this mean that Islam does not matter in Afghan Politics?

When the central government finds itself vulnerable against foreign powers or against internal non-state entities, the role of Islam emerges powerful. However, the cases of the Anglo-Afghan Wars present examples when members of the civil society, especially the religious establishment and the tribal authorities used Islam in order to wage a battle for their autonomy. Similarly, the decade-long jihad against the Soviet occupiers of Afghanistan was waged wearing the legitimate cloak of Islam. Still, a careful scrutiny of the strategies of the leadership of the Jihad provides ample evidence that the battle was less about religion and more about politics.

In similar vain, public policy analysts in the West, and some Western scholars, go to great lengths to depict the Taliban resistance to the Kabul government as an exclusively *Islamic* movement. Certainly, in Afghanistan, Islam identifies the framework for a system of norms, a code regulating human interpersonal relations, or social morality (Roy 1980). Nevertheless, excessive attention directed to the abovementioned points disregards the complex spiritual dimensions of the religion. This spiritual component is significant because it is manifest in human behavior and observable in society. The spiritual dimension of Islam invites Muslims to leave the sanctuary and familiarity of their personal, tribal, or national affiliations and loyalties and join the umma — the community of the believers. Membership in the umma is

transcendental and extends beyond the existing political, legal, and social boundaries. Therefore, the approach of certain Western scholars, Islamist intellectuals, and the way in which some of the ulama (experts on Islamic Law, or Shariat) concentrate on a strict legalistic interpretation of Islam, through their efforts, actually reduces Islam to a system of rules.

Hence, in the case of Afghanistan it is incorrect to contend that the Taliban's exclusive priority is to introduce a "new world order" based on the application of Shariat (Islamic Law). This reductionist conceptualization of complex world politics, explicitly or implicitly, accept Bernard Lewis's distorted perspectives on Islam or Samuel Huntington's ethno-centric thinking in *Clash of Civilization*. The argument presented here is that Taliban resistance is at its core a nationalist resistance to external forces and their Afghan allies, or perceived allies. In fact, Political Islam is a complex phenomenon specific to diverse regions and peoples of the world. For example, Nazi Ayubi (1991) contends that contemporary political Islam is a "new invention" and should not be considered a "return" to the "golden age" in the history of Islam. Ayubi also argues that the role of religion in Muslim states is not historically consistent with realities He wants to dispel the orientalist/ fundamentalist myth that Islam is by its nature a political religion (*Ibid.*, 3). He presents arguments from Islamic history to explain that the "political nature" of Islam as a theoretical construct is not historically valid. He examines the discrepancies between the utopian reconstruction of the past and existing historical reality. Ayubi validates his arguments by presenting analyses of the primary texts of Islamic political theory. He asserts that the jurists in charge of compiling the documents were indeed the same jurists who were state functionaries and received patronage from state elites. Ayubi asserts that the texts on Islamic political theory were prescriptive and not descriptive. Contemporary Islamists and Orientalists

have treated these same texts as describing a “golden age” of Islam. With respect to the role of religion in state and society, Ayubi contradicts the notion of the Islamists, that Islam formed the theory and practice of the early Islamic state. Ayubi argues in favor of the reverse, that it was the states political and economic institutions that appropriated Islam.

Regarding the political interpretation of the Islam of the Taliban movement, political Islam manifests itself in the form of the Taliban, a modern movement firmly entrenched in contemporary Afghan politics. Eden Naby (1988: 787) articulates that the utilization of religious expressions and symbols in times of crisis is an ancient method and spans vast geographic regions, cultures and peoples. In order to achieve some semblance of legitimacy, the Taliban leadership references an idealized Islamic political theory and promises to create a political order consistent with the fundamentals of Islam. In this sense, the Taliban did not invent a new ideology; they are manipulating the meaning of strategic words and symbols that hold significance in the psyche of the Afghans. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (2007) assert that political elites “invent traditions”, and that the invention of so-called authentic traditions has significant social and political functions in society. Ayubi (1991: 34) appropriately states: “It is one of the ironies of Utopia that nostalgia can indeed be aroused for things that have never really existed.” The Taliban resurrect an ideal past from Islamic history is very distinct because the “golden age” of Islam is a reference to the faith’s early years under the authority of the Prophet Mohammad and the subsequent four caliphs. The nostalgia for the past does not take into consideration that the first and most ideal of the Muslim communities as well as rulers of that community were Arab and identified with a specific region of the world. The glories of the early Muslims were not the glories of the Pashtun Afghans. Subsequent Islamic empires—that of the

Ottomans and the Mughals was not Arab. One was Turkish and the other Central Asian. Furthermore, the Safavid Empire was Persian and Shiite. Regardless, the Taliban movement is an example of the response to alienation from the state structures and a search for authenticity. Ayubi (1991: 226) argues that the Islamists are “on a collision course with the State whose cultural alterity, political authoritarianism and economic failure are taken by the Islamists to be symptoms of a deeper sin, which is betrayal of God.” The Taliban are a modern political phenomenon; this is not a revival of an ancient Islam. In fact, the political utilization Islam is a part of a recurring pattern of ethnic and nationalist mythmaking in Afghan history whereby key elites attempt to galvanize popular support to displace one regime by chastising it as an agent of colonial or neo-colonial rule.

Furthermore, culturally deterministic notions regarding Islamic societies have a negative impact on western governments’ foreign policies towards Muslim states. Therefore, scholarship that informs foreign policy on Islam and Islamic societies becomes very important. These discourses are exceptionally important as they will inform American foreign policy, and contribute to our understanding, or lack thereof, of that which is referred to as “the Islamic world” and Islamist movements. Islamist movements are not narrow and specific units with clearly defined beginning and ending point, but a complex attempt in which some Muslims participate in search of authenticity.

Let us turn our attention to the main scholars who promote the culturally deterministic arguments. Professor Lewis Bernard presents a set of contentious theses in his book *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*. The book is an attempt to investigate the preconditions that allowed the political, ideological, and violent struggles between Arabs,

Muslims and the radical Muslims of the modern era, and the West. Lewis is primarily preoccupied with the question of why Muslims hate the West. Professor Lewis adheres to the same ideological and methodological school of thought as Samuel Huntington, the author of *The Clash of Civilization: and the Remaking of World Order*. Both scholars are proponents of a conservative political thought in the West. Lewis and Huntington identify the theological differences between Islam and Christianity as the root cause of the problems of contemporary world conflict. Huntington (1996: 183) stipulates that the prospects of perilous clashes between East and West are the result of fundamental differences that exist between two civilizations: “The West and the rest.” Furthermore, he stipulates that the extreme conflicts exists “between Muslim and Asian societies on the one hand, and the West on the other” (*Ibid.*).

Huntington asserts that in the post Cold War world, the most persistent, significant, and dangerous conflicts will not be waged between different economic groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities (21). Further more, Huntington identifies civilizations as all-encompassing cultural entities; therefore, conflicts between groups from different civilizations influence global politics (128). Huntington’s most controversial assertion is that the major differences in political and economic development among civilizations are rooted in their different cultures. (29).

A number of scholars have criticized Huntington’s theses and the policy recommendations generated from his book. Perhaps the most troubling assertions Huntington presents relate to the concept of “civilizations.” Huntington’s utilization of the term civilization to denote, “order and generalize about reality” is a simplification of complex world realities. Furthermore, Huntington’s arguments regarding the composition of civilizations are inconsistent

and lack supporting evidence. Huntington identifies his civilizations as “the broadest level of cultural identity” or “the broadest cultural entities.” Such an understanding of civilizations proposes that groups within a civilization are exclusively loyal and associate with other groups within that civilization. This argument disregards competition based upon economics, distribution of resources, ethnic affiliations and regional associations. For example, Huntington’s assertion that civilizations are characteristic of coherent, interdependent units lacks supporting evidence. In addition, Huntington’s assertion that groups belonging to different civilizations naturally distrust each other and perceive the outside group as a threat disregards reality.

Throughout the twentieth century, Afghans adhered to the same religion and shared similarities in cultures; yet, during the latter part of the last century this society was divided along many ideological lines. Members of the same family adhered to leftist or Islamist ideologies and fought each other bitterly. The previous chapter identified the contentions between the Mujahideen leadership. Similarly, members of the Afghan resistance joined to fight the “godless” Soviets and the domestic communists; however, simultaneously the Islamic resistance lacked internal cohesion. After the conclusion of the Soviet occupation, the first three years of Mujahideen rule was divisive. Disagreements on a future government, and political settlements easily provoked fighting. Their persistent divisions were not fueled by personal clashes; they were triggered by ethnic, tribal, and religious antipathies. Furthermore, the relationships between the two neighboring Muslim states, Afghanistan and Pakistan, have experienced many deteriorating conditions. The previous chapter examined the issue of Pashtunistan as a major contributing source of deep contentions that exist between the two

countries. The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan is influenced by geopolitics and has very little to do with a shared culture or common *civilization* ties.

Why should a state's "cultural identity" define its place in world politics? Saudi culture is not what secures that country's place in world politics. Certainly, the al-Saud family benefits from its status as the guardian of the most important Islamic holy sites, including the cities of Mecca and Medina. Nevertheless, this symbolic capital is limited. Rather it is the kingdom's natural resources, and specifically its strategic relationship with prominent world powers that provides Saudi Arabia with influence in international politics. Huntington neglects to address that intense conflicts exist within civilizations, or that there is no plausible reason to assume that an individual's loyalty naturally extends to encompass a civilization. This is a theoretical concept that only scholars understand, and is outside the scope of millions of nearly illiterate people around the world. For millions of the world's population loyalty extending beyond the nation state is generally weak, or not even recognized or acknowledged except in limited contexts<sup>38</sup>.

Huntington proposes the significance of religious solidarity. However, religious loyalties may not be an indication of reality, and they are likely encouraged by political elites. The ten year protracted war between Iran and Iraq contradicts Huntington's thesis regarding loyalties between civilizations. Two Muslim states engaged each other in a decade long intense war. Interestingly, Iraq received assistance from the United States in this conflict — an outside party a core state in another civilization. Did Iraq and the United States share similar cultural or religious traits? According to Huntington, cultural differences lead to conflict and violence between

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<sup>38</sup> There is a growing literature around "European" or "EU" identity. While political leaders in Brussels would love for that identity to become the primary identity of most Europeans the reality is that most citizens remain loyal either to their home states (e.g., Spain) or their ethnic community (e.g., Basques and Catalans in Spain). It is incorrect to assume that European identity is supposed to be the great exception of a regional identity that is supposed to encompass a civilization.

people espousing different cultural identities. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait is another example of inter-civilizational conflict. That conflict brought discontent and mistrust amongst the Muslim states of the region, and again involved external parties in the conflict. Huntington projects the myth that members of the same civilization extend loyalties to each other, yet, in the case of the "Islamic civilization" there is an absence of cooperation. In fact, foreign policy between the Muslim states is frequently conducted through Washington, London, or another third party.<sup>39</sup>

Huntington (1996) contends that cultural differentiation is increasing in the contemporary world. This assertion discredits the impact of modernization, industrialization, communications advances, and technological achievements. These advances connect diverse regions people of the world. Furthermore, Huntington asserts that conflict between civilizations has become intense because of the chances that conflict in one region will spread out to include allies from affiliated civilizations. In true alarmist fashion, he explains that the conflicts of the modern era are waged "between peoples belonging to different cultural entities" (*Ibid.*, 28). This type of violence between different civilizations will likely escalate as other states and groups from these civilizations rally to support of their "kin countries" (*Ibid.*). However, what is the impetus for the spread of conflict from one civilization to another? Should we credit cultural differences, particularly the type that exists between "civilizations," for generating conflicts around the world?

Are clashes between civilizations inevitable? Huntington responds in the affirmative, explaining that conflicts have extended lineage in the human psyche. In fact, human beings define themselves by associating with numerous associations and not just "ancestry, religion,

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<sup>39</sup> A shared faith did not prevent civil war in Pakistan and the state's partition into Pakistan and Bangladesh. Nor has the umbrella of Islam spared Turks and Kurds from decades of conflict.

language, history, values, customs, and institutions” (21). Furthermore, he explains that humans assert their identity by citing the distinctions of “our” group from other groups. “We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against” (*Ibid.*, 21). Hence, Huntington’s thesis stands on precarious ground. For example, the identification with groups does not necessarily lead to conflict. Whether or not conflict is generated from a particular identity will depend on the groups with which we identify and also to the extent we feel vulnerable to the political, and economic and territorial wishes of our political elites.

Huntington’s thesis is misleading when he claims that loyalties to a particular civilization will lead inevitably to conflict. The example of the Iran and Iraq War does not support his argument. The Bosnian tragedy is another case in point. If Huntington’s thesis was credible, then there was a great chance of a severe escalation between Germany and other European allies with emotional ties or “civilizational” loyalties to Croatia, Russia to Serbia, and Turkey and other Muslim states to the Bosnian Muslims. However, outside loyalties played a prominent role; the United States for example, gave substantial assistance to Bosnia rather than support the secessionist attempts of the Croats or Serbs. Let us also remember that, NATO intervened in order to neutralize hostilities between the three primary groups. In fact NATO’s military intervention supported a state with a predominantly Muslim population. In contemporary global politics, cultural associations play a less significant role to geopolitical realities than Huntington would have us believe.

Samuel Huntington’s stereotypes regarding civilizations portray the post-1990 world as one where “local politics is the politics of ethnicity; global politics is the politics of civilizations”

(1996: 28). The question imbedded in Huntington's thesis compels a researcher to inquire: "with the end of the Cold War, who or what is the enemy of the United States?" This question is especially troubling because Huntington engages in a type of dangerous reductionism that depicts international relations in contemporary world as one beset by endless cultural competition. He states, "The relationship between Islam and Christianity, both Orthodox and Western, have often been stormy. Each has been the other's Other... to the continuing and deeply conflictual relation between Islam and Christianity" (*Ibid.*, 209). In this context, Huntington is persuades policy makers to think of a relentless enemy (Islam and Muslims) in order to keep "our" homes in order. Such an adversary would be comforting to policy makers accustomed, as the Muslim adversary is reminiscent of the tensions between Cold War rivals. Furthermore, the arbitrary categorization of contemporary states into distinct civilizations as intrinsically hostile is dangerous. These categorizations transform otherwise neutral or even amiable states into enemies. A subsequent threat of Huntington's "civilizational" approach to foreign policy may lead other states to unify against the United States if only out of a sense of self-preservation, and realizing a tragic self-fulfilling prophecy.

Bernard Lewis also takes up the search for a new enemy after the conclusion of the Cold War. The author of *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* addresses specific historic events and epochs that Lewis believed caused the Muslims to hate and resent the West, and this hatred eventually resulted in the events of September 11, 2001. Lewis shares Huntington's mindset, and similarly he based his thesis on the notion of differences and the inevitable contentions that exist between Islam and Christianity. Lewis disregards the fact that both Christianity and Islam emerged in the same region of the world, and that two faiths share a

very close historic lineage. During the course of history of Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived both Islam and Christianity lived in relative harmony without significant tensions. Such examples of peaceful coexistence were in Andalusia under the Caliphate and the religiously heterogonous Ottoman Empire.

Regardless of the similarities that exist between the two religious traditions, Lewis and Huntington assert that the cause of conflict in the world, or at least between East and West, emerges from the differences in the belief systems and the values of the two religious traditions. Both scholars make clever arguments to explain how Islam is deficient in and opposed to universal values. The universal values they reference are, they claim, Western in origin. They argue that it is because of this defect in their values that Muslims do not accept democratic types of governments. These two scholars are quite myopic in their world views. Occasionally they contradict their own theses. For instance, according to Huntington (1997: 209): “At times peaceful coexistence has prevailed; more often the relation has been one of intense rivalry and of varying degrees of hot war.” Neither Huntington, nor Lewis, pause to take into consideration the violence of the twentieth century, particularly the violent clashes between the same value infused societies of the western world. The scholars also neglect that throughout history conflicts and wars were waged irrelevant of religious differences. Certainly, through the course of history, many non-religious struggles have resulted in human and material loss, and ensued in violence and resentment in this world.

Bernard Lewis (2002) investigates two unrelated questions in his book. The first question is why did the Islamic world, once the epicenter of scientific progress and achievements, fall behind the West? The second question addressed by Lewis is, what is the genealogy of Muslim

anger exhibited in the violent actions of terrorist and radical groups? The most obvious weakness of his thesis pertains to the fact that he categorizes all Muslims into one unit, and does not make a distinction between a small fringe group and the millions of non-violent Muslims. Lewis (2002) describes the progress and innovation of the Islamic civilization in the following words: “For centuries the European world view and self view of Muslims seemed well grounded. Islam represented the greatest military power on Earth — its armies at the very same time were invading Europe and Africa, India and China. It was the foremost economic power in the world... It had achieved the highest level so far in human history in the arts and sciences of civilizations” (*Ibid.*, 6). Bernard Lewis explains that the status of the Islamic civilization changed abruptly. However, he does not provide the historic context for the decline of the Islamic civilization, nor does he identify the problem of the Islamic civilization’s lack of progress in its appropriate global context. He disregards, that economic, political, and social stagnation has been prevalent in all societies. In addition, Lewis equates the decline of “Islam” as an empire with the decline of the “Ottomans”.

Rather, Lewis (2002) asserts that the lack of progress of the Muslim states is a specific Islamic anomaly, and that only the Muslims of world have failed to catch up with the advances of the West. Furthermore, Lewis advances that the loss of prestige of the Islamic civilization has made the Muslims humiliated and resentful. He asserts that not only are the Muslims failures, but their lack of acknowledging the reasons for their failings is the reason for their downfall. Rather than investigating the reasons for stagnation they blame the west. Lewis fancies himself assuming the role of the “awakener” calling on the Muslims to wake up from their slumber and the feeling of victimhood and examine the reasons why Muslim societies have become rife with

poverty and ignorance (*Ibid.*, 151). He advises Muslims to stop looking for a scapegoat — i.e., the developed and Christian societies. In the post 2001 world, such reductionists are dangerous because these assertions are rife with biases, value judgments, and preconceptions. Additionally, the title of Lewis's book answers its own question. Lewis explains that the unjustified resentment of the Muslims against the Christian world creates Islamic radicals and terrorists, and this is directly linked to the occurrence of September 11. Lewis advances his shaky hypothesis in the following quote:

If the people of the Middle East continue on their present path, the suicide bombers may become a metaphor for the whole region, and there will be no escape from a downward spiral of hate and spite, rage and self-pity, poverty and oppression, culminating sooner or later in yet another alien domination; perhaps from a new Europe reverting to old ways, perhaps from a resurgent Russia, perhaps from some new, expanding superpower in the East. If they can abandon grievance and victimhood, settle their differences, and join their talents, energies, and resources in a common creative endeavor, then they can once again make the Middle East, in modern times as it was in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, a major center of civilization. For the time, being the choice is their own. (Lewis 2002: 209)

Professor Lewis's list of comments are accusatory rather than engaging his readers in a serious scholarly discussion regarding a diverse group of people residing on every continent of the world, subscribing to hundreds of languages, ethnicities, cultural traditions, religious denominations, political, economic and social systems. True, Lewis has done a disservice to the vast populations of the Muslims of the world; he has also divested the "Christian West" of its diverse identity. Just as Muslims cannot be stereotyped into tidy packages Christians and the West should resent being bound within the confines Lewis prescribes. An important question to address to Lewis is who is he blaming? Are his grievances against terrorist groups or millions of

ordinary people who live around the world? Furthermore, Lewis writes about the Middle East and the Muslim world synonymously, creating confusion in the mind of the reader. For example, the “Muslim world” is a generalized and rather abstract term applied to the regions of the world where Muslims predominantly reside. However, the Middle East is a specific term imbued with political connotations. This geographic label conjures up in the mind of the reader a specific region of the world with a delineated and specific border and shared colonial legacies.

Lewis (2002: 100) attributes the existing conditions of the contemporary Muslim societies to the unique characteristics of Islam. He contends that the primary reason for the lack of development of Muslim societies is the absence of secularism in Islam, and the second is the inherent sexism in Islam (*Ibid.*, 67, 157). In his juxtaposition of Islam and Christianity, he attributes western progress to the existence of secularism in Christianity. Lewis pursues his topic in a single-minded fashion. If we agree with Lewis’s hypothesis and accept his assertion regarding the stagnation of Muslim societies, then what is the plausible explanation for the lack of development of countless non-Muslim countries on the planet? If Lewis is correct, and Christianity is the impetus behind the Western civilization, then, what is the reason for Japan, China, and India’s progress? Furthermore, if Christianity is the reason to explain Western advancements, then Lewis fails to explain why countries in Latin America and South America lag far behind the rest of the Christian world. Arguably, before the arrival of Christianity several indigenous populations in the Americas — e.g., Aztec, Mayans, Inca — experienced a renaissance in their own rights. It may even be argued that with the advent of Christianity the previously mentioned societies experienced stagnation. Christianity is not the sole proprietor of western accomplishments, nor is Islam the reason for the backwardness of political communities

adhering to Islam. Some scholars argue that capitalism and colonialism offer plausible explanations.

Lewis cites another issue regarding the lack of progress of the Muslims. He states that the inferior status of women in Muslim societies has led to stagnation. Lewis contends that the West has achieved progress because women have received a unique treatment and that the West holds particular perception about women that are conducive to progress. Again, Lewis does not provide evidence to support this claim. Indeed, western technological progress in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries preceded significant changes in the status of women in Western society. His understanding of the differences between Christianity and Islam regarding gender are informed by orientalist interpretations mainly made by Western men. Furthermore, sexism exists in all religions and does not remain exclusively within the purview of Islam. Lewis must be aware of the historic position of the Catholic Church and clergy regarding women. Lewis also seems to forget that both Islam and Christianity have their roots in the strict patriarchal framework of the ancient prophets, particularly Abraham. Lewis neglects to acknowledge that societies are constantly evolving, and that societal pressure is the impetus for this transformation of perceptions of strict religious interpretations.

### **Islam, Politics and Society**

The topic of Islam and politics addresses many countries located in diverse geographic regions of the world. Understandably, throughout the world many scholars have contributed to the scholarly literature on this topic. However, as mentioned above, Western scholarship on this topic is dominated by two names — Bernard Lewis (2002) and Samuel Huntington (1996).

These scholars present invalid theoretical claims and distort Islam. Lewis and Huntington perceive Islam as both a religion and state. They present Islam as an “organic” religious as well as a political system where a distinction between religion and politics does not exist. In such a framework, the religious institution and the society are perceived to meld into one entity. In addition, in this scenario, social order is inspired by divine intervention, and the political leadership exercises authority according to religious law and tradition. Similarly, contemporary Islamists also support this latter notion of politics and society. However, Ayubi (1991: 34) would counter the claim that Islam formed the theory and practice of early Islamic communities.

The abovementioned arguments are presented within a culturally deterministic framework. Every aspect of Muslim societies as well as explanations describing the progress or lack of progress of diverse set of societies is reduced to the religion itself. This type of religious determinism does not take into consideration regional and cultural diversity that exists among all Muslim societies. Furthermore, in this context, Western values and concepts of power are prioritized and presented as superior to the values and concepts of Muslim societies (Said 1979).

In the West, Lewis enjoys a prestigious status and he is considered a major authority on Islam. Lewis (2002) argues that while Islam inspired a great civilization and enriched the world, Islam also inspired in some of its followers hatred and violence. He also asserts that Islamic values are inherently opposed to universal — read Western — values. Huntington’s famous *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* supports the alarmism that Lewis pursued and he is as culturally deterministic as Lewis. Trepidation over cultural differences is a frequent theme in many of his recent works.<sup>40</sup> In *Clash of Civilizations* Huntington claims that

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<sup>40</sup> Culture, or what some might call *cultural determinism*, plays a major role in Huntington’s analysis of both international and domestic politics. In 1996 he claimed that the primary threat to world order came

the Muslims penchant for war and violence are undeniable facts. Whereas Karl Marx assumed different classes always were in conflict, Huntington has a similar view about cultures, or “civilizations” as he groups supposedly similar cultural communities.

In contrast to Lewis and Huntington, other scholars appreciate the great diversity and complexity of Islamic societies. These scholars argue that political Islam is not inherently opposed to modernity. For example, Benjamin Smith (2004), Nazih Ayubi (1991), and Olivier Roy (1990, 1994), propose engaging Islamist movements, as this will prove as a test to the movements’ ability to adapt and change and create a legitimate reputation for itself in the eyes of the population. Smith (2004), Ayubi (1991), and Roy (1990, 1994) claim that it is important to view Islamist organizations, primarily, as modern social movements whose successes are linked to the movements appropriation of select terminology and symbolism in an attempt to mobilize the population towards a specific goal. In fact the association of the people to Islamist movements may not even be motivated by religion and hence the association with Islamic movements is likely informed by shared grievances. Ayubi (1991: 158) asserts that contemporary Islamic movements are “the moralistic/culturalistic expression of a development crisis.” Emmanuel Sivan (1983, 1985) and Roy (1985: 52) concur. They recommend that Islamist movements are modern movements and are a response of the disenchanting and impoverished populations of the world demanding to receive the benefits of modern political, social and economic systems.

Sivan (1985) contends that Islamist movements fill an important role in the lives of marginalized populations. He examines the role played by “rising expectations,” especially

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from Islam. In his book *Who are We?* the same author argues that the paramount internal threat to Western societies comes from multiculturalism. In the United States, specifically, the threat to internal cohesion comes from its growing Latino population.

among educated youth. Indisputably, all those theorists who have examined in depth the main socioeconomic bases of the Islamists' support focus on the "young" as the primary demographic group. For example, Wiktorowicz (2004), argues that one common denominator in those countries that have exhibited higher rates of support for the Islamists' cause are countries with a larger percentage of young people. According to Sivan (1985: 125): "The greater the expectations, the deeper the fall to the abyss of despair when the hopes failed to materialize." Islamic fundamentalism plays a key role as an ideology of protest against arbitrary rule and socioeconomic injustice (Dekmejian 1985).

In the absence of other institutional and ideological channels of opposition, fundamentalism has provided a strategic opportunity for expressing popular displeasure regarding the *status quo*. This articulation of popular dissatisfaction in a religious framework is not exclusive to Islam; an important parallel in Christianity exists. During the 1980s, Poles who felt marginalized by the Communist regime in Warsaw turned to the Roman Catholic Church for their social, political, and moral inspiration. In its most fundamental sense, political Islam should be seen as an ideology of protest. Thus, political Islam informs the groups most adversely affected by the existing order converge in their criticism of the *status quo*. A key component of this debate is to understand religion's true role. Arguably Islamists rely upon and incorporate the symbolism, language and discourse of Islam to legitimize their claims. However, their grievances are social, economic and, most importantly, political realities.

In fact, this contemporary view of Islam as a vehicle for political protest is not new. Throughout its history, Islam has been utilized both by leaders to legitimize their rule (e.g., Nasr 2001), and by revolutionaries to denounce it. Islam's popularity and the concepts of social

justice, equality, and the ending of oppressive structures and systems, has given Islamism the opportunity to integrate its role as both an ideology to empower disenfranchised people and provide them with a platform from which to launch political protest.

Islam was employed as an effective ideological weapon to mobilize the Afghan people against British imperial intrusions during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Nawid 1997: 581-82). Again, Islam was effectively utilized during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century against the Soviet occupation and the agnostic Kabul regime, providing legitimacy to the universality of the struggle in the form of jihad (holy war). External supporters of the Afghan Mujahideen (freedom fighters), including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States further endorsed the sanctification of the cause against Soviet occupation. Once more Islam has become the ideology of protest and resistance. This time, however, it has been turned towards a new occupier — the American-backed government in Kabul.

### **Politics in the “Islamic Leviathan”**

An alternative to the cultural determinism found in Huntington and Lewis is Vali Nasr’s *Islamic Leviathan* (2001). Nasr examines the concept of “Islamic Politics” in Pakistan and Malaysia. Islam has played a significant role in the two non-Arab and multi-cultural Muslim societies for many centuries. Certainly, the societies are old, but the states (Malaysia and Pakistan) are 20<sup>th</sup> century inventions, and hence, they are historically young. However, political elites in the two countries have not consistently sought to implement policies within an Islamic framework. At times, they have altered public policy in a clearly Islamic direction. On other occasions, they have changed public policy, moving in a more secular direction. Such vacillating

policies were not dependent on religion itself. Therefore, Islam in these two societies is not a variable, it is, in a manner of speaking, a historic constant.

If Islam is not the key explanatory variable, what is? Nasr (2001) articulates that many in these two states do not view the post-colonial state as legitimate. Islam, on the other hand, epitomizes all that is legitimate. In this manner, political elites in both Pakistan and Malaysia have strategically attempted to associate the weak post-colonial state with Islam. Political elites pragmatically and strategically employ Islamist policies in an attempt to anoint the state with the positive image of Islam. Thus, what changed over time was the aspirations of the political leaders who sought to manipulate Islam at different times in an attempt to harness public support.

The premise of Nasr's argument establishes the strategic or pragmatic role of religion in society. How does religion influence politics in Muslim societies? What is the relationship between the state and society, and how does Islam manage that relationship? In multi-ethnic and divided societies in "the Muslim world," and in particular during crises periods, Islam becomes relevant. State leaders employ Islam as a tool to legitimize their power and extend the state's influence in society. In this context, Islam is being used as a means to confront opposition and unify the population.

### **The Taliban**

The instability of the post-Soviet era opened a political space for the emergence of the Taliban to come into power. The Taliban imposed their particular version of Islamic governance from 1994 until they were deposed in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Although driven from office many of the former Taliban continue to resist the Western-backed Karzai

government. By way of his prison memoirs, Mulla Zaef (2008) presents us with a form of resistance. He was the former Afghan ambassador to Pakistan. While on a diplomatic mission to Pakistan, he was captured by the Pakistan Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) and submitted to the United States custody. Subsequently he was transported to the prison facilities in Guantanamo. He contends that the government of Pakistan did not acknowledge his diplomatic status and treated him like “a lamb handed over to the wolves” (Zaef 2008: 3). Zaef asserts repeatedly that the leadership of Pakistan, a neighboring Muslim state, should not have betrayed him, and his treatment was a cowardly act and a disservice to Islam. Zaef and other Taliban claim that they protect Afghan land, honor and Islam. It is important to note that the government of Pakistan once considered Mullah Zaef an ally. Pakistan was one of three countries that extended official recognition to the Taliban government.

Many accounts exist regarding the Taliban’s origins. However, the genesis of this movement is a manifestation of the political realities of Afghanistan. (Ewans 2002: 182; Maley 1998; Rashid 1998). The Taliban were the Afghan refugee students from madrassas in Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province (Ewans 2002: 182; Maley 1998). The Taliban assert that they were organized in a number of provinces in Afghanistan as far back as the 1980s. After the demise of the Communist regime in Kabul, they waited to see if the Mujahideen could unite the country and establish a government. A number of the Taliban members fought as Mujahideen during the 1980s. Regardless of the Mujahideen governing capabilities, Pakistan had other geopolitical interests. Pakistan’s interior minister Nasirurrlah Babur wanted to open an overland trade route to central Asia. After the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, Central Asia gained the attention of Pakistani policy makers (Ewans 2002: 183). In order to promote its

foreign policy objectives, Pakistan was complicit in the Taliban's emergence. After the demise of the Communist regime in Kabul, Pakistan's ISI supported Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, while the Interior Minister, Babur courted the Taliban. Ahmad Rashid (1998: 74-76) states that subsequently, the Interior Minister recruited the ISI, and joined forces with Maulana Fazlur Rahman of the *Jamiat-Ulema-i-Islami* (JUI). Fazlur Rahman even visited Washington and European capitals to promote the Taliban (Rashid 1998: 76). The combined effort of these parties mobilized 20,000 fighters within a span of six months (Ewans 2002: 182.). The Taliban fighters received logistics support, weapons, and fuel from Pakistan. The student-led army was highly professional and proficient in the use of the weapons (Davis 1998: 54-55). Their speed and mobility and the mystery that shrouded the Taliban gave rise to a growing mythology about their invincibility.

Lewis, Huntington and many Western scholars and policy makers simply assume that this Taliban phenomenon is a purely religious affair. In contrast to this line of reasoning, the thesis presented here is that politically militant Islam in Afghanistan has less to do with religion than with nationalism. It is, in a manner of speaking, a nationalist campaign against a foreign-supported government. This campaign is simply being championed in the name of religion.

The Taliban is phenomenon is a product of the geopolitical realities of Afghanistan and the region. The primary religious and ideological influence on the Taliban was the *Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islami*. The *Jamiat madrassas* offered impoverished Afghan youth the opportunity for free education. For thousands of Afghan boys, Pakistan was home rather Afghanistan (Rashid 1998: 74). Pakistan promoted by prominent Mujahideen commanders such as Jalaluddin Haqani in the Taliban Movement (Davis 1998: 50). In addition to madrassa's students, former

Mujahideen leaders, and former Communist regime officers were absorbed into the Taliban Movement. The diverse membership of the Taliban Movement discredits Huntington's assertion that people's cultural and religious identities serve as the primary source of conflict. The works of both Huntington and Lewis support the ongoing military engagement between the Taliban and the U.S. military as an inevitable conflict. Such an assumption is based on the false premise that the Taliban movement is an Islamic revivalist movement, exclusively religious in nature and obsessed with bringing about a new and anti-Western world order that gives precedence to Islam. This scenario does not acknowledge that the Taliban did not emerge in a political vacuum.

Furthermore, the Taliban are political personalities struggling to achieve particular socio-economic and political objectives. The leadership of the movement consists of politically strategic actors cognizant of the fact that in order to offer themselves as a political alternative to the Karzai administration, they must appear legitimate to ordinary Afghans. The Taliban must appeal to the populations' sense of national identity, honor and autonomy. They must appear legitimate in an ethnically and linguistically diverse Afghanistan. Hence, they employ a two-pronged strategy. They engage in a type of "imagined" traditions in order to appeal to the population, reminding the citizenry that Islam is the sanctuary that will protect them from the onslaught of foreign invaders. The Taliban leadership is not inventing a new ideology; they are strategically manipulating the existing meaning of select words and symbols that hold importance in the imagination of the Afghans. It is a battle for the concept of Afghan identity, honor and territory.

Furthermore, the Taliban leadership is engaged in exploiting the emotional connection of the people to mobilize them and to direct their energies to promote the liberation of Afghanistan

from foreign clutches. In addition, they make full use of an Islamic type of social justice in order to shame the Kabul regime's inept and corrupt administration and judicial systems. Islam does have an important social justice component; however, the Taliban cannot claim to have integrated the fundamentals of Islam in their policies. Their government was notorious for human rights abuses and frequently their policies were bereft of Afghan characteristics. The public beating of women is a practice that contradicts Pashtunwali (Pashtun Code of Conduct). Pashtunwali, does not permit contact between a male who is not a maharam — brother, father, or husband to a Pashtun women. Nevertheless, in the current context of an occupied Afghanistan, Afghans frequently contradict the Taliban assertion that they are the rightful guardians of Islam and the people of Afghanistan. In this sense, the Taliban elites “invent traditions” and the promotion of the so-called authentic traditions has significant social and political functions in the current environment Hobsbawm and Ranger (2007). This is particularly consistent with moment of national crisis.

When the Taliban regime was in power, they were arguably a less than legitimate regime. However, currently they have won favor with the disenfranchised and abused population. For example, many of the Afghan radio and television programs broadcast Afghan citizens accounts that they prefer to seek justice in Taliban Shariat courts rather than approach the central governments courts, where bribery and nepotism run rampant. In the eyes of the Afghan people the Taliban provide a realistic alternative to the corrupt Karzai government installed at the behest of foreign powers. The abuse and antipathy of the central government, combined with the realities of foreign occupation provides the impetus for Taliban mobilization. How are large groups of populations mobilized especially if the members of a group do not receive material

benefits or official recognition for their sacrifices? Barreto (2009) states that the human psyche has a need for group solidarity and this need makes it possible to join forces with a nationalist movement. Humans do not feel compelled to join every movement; rather we embark on a collective action struggle only when we have a strong “emotional attachment” to the cause.

If Huntington and Lewis are correct, then public policy analysts in the West, supported by various scholars from the Political Culture school of thought are appropriately portraying the Taliban resistance to the Karzai administration as an exclusively Islamic movement. However, such notions are contrived and exhibit cultural biases. How can Islam be a defining variable in the resistance against the central government when 98% of the population of Afghanistan adheres to Islam?

Present scholarship on politics and society in Afghanistan is scarce. Research on Afghanistan has been left to the ministrations of a handful of journalists. While the journalists provide accounts of current trends in politics in Afghanistan, they are not trained to provide comprehensive analysis of politics in Afghanistan. Hence, they cannot explain matters of grave political concern. Research on Afghanistan is also conducted in various policy centers around the globe. While some good quality papers have been published, there are limitations with the approach employed by these centers. Afghanistan’s complex historical, political, and social dynamics are reduced to a single unit, and Afghanistan is simply relegated as an extension of either foreign policy objectives or national security concerns. The complex internal dynamics and diverse nature of politics and society of the country are neglected.

Many scholars who look at the intersection of identity and socio-political phenomenon focus their efforts on ethnographic research. However, given that there is a de facto war in the

country, that research method will not be available for some time. Furthermore, the Afghan tribal structure is deeply fragmented and years of conflict and violence has led to the existence of antagonism between Afghanistan's various ethnic groups making it nearly impossible for a researcher to talk about politically sensitive issues and to conduct proper research. The Afghan war accelerated the process of ethnic crystallization, and brought about a renewed sense of political awareness of ethnic identity. For example, Sunni Persian speakers did not previously use the word "Tajik"; that was a term applied to them by both Soviet and Western ethnologists. Today, they tend to define themselves as an ethnic group. Similarly, before the war, the non-Pashtun groups did not have a tradition of handling weapons. The war militarized Afghan society to such an extreme degree that currently opportunities to own and use weapons are abundant. Hence, military power is no longer perceived as an exclusively Pashtun prerogative. In the 1980s, the Communist regime coined the word *melliati* to lend a political expression to the diverse ethnic groups in Afghanistan. This policy did not succeed in building a cohesive identity among the population. On the contrary, this national policy provided a new ethnic awareness among dominated ethnic groups.

## **Conclusion**

Contemporary debates over the political future of Afghanistan does not take into consideration that nearly three decades of war has altered the social and political landscape in Afghanistan. The war has brought a change in the ethnic balance, mainly a decrease in Pashtun influence. The war played a prominent role in stressing ethnic identities, and brought linguistic and religious concerns to the front. As mentioned previously, the de facto war accelerated this

process of ethnic crystallization, and brought about a type of political awareness of ethnic identity. This arrangement forces political leaders into a battle over Kabul, a battle to which the fragmented social structure of Afghanistan inevitably gives a varied and ever shifting character. These complex political and social characteristics of the state and society in Afghanistan cannot be studied exclusively from one single foreign policy objective. A more sophisticated approach, an interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach is required.

## **Chapter 5: For the Afghan Nation**

The previous chapters argued that Islam plays a stabilizing role in the ethnically, linguistically and regionally diverse Afghan state and society. Since the 1880s, Afghan kings and policy makers have attempted, sometimes at great costs, to unify the diverse populations residing within the boundaries of modern Afghanistan and imposing upon the people the importance of national unity. These battles for unification were most intense and of paramount importance for elites as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were fraught with foreign interventions. For example, Afghan elites in the Anglo-Afghan Wars period impressed upon the public that while they may speak distinct languages, hold membership in distinct ethnic groups, and reside in pockets of the country that were occasionally isolated from the political and administrative machinations of the state, their independence, autonomy, and survival was linked to keeping foreign elements at check. During the latter part of the twentieth century, maintaining the dignity of the state, the people and the religion from contamination by Soviet forces resulted in a national war for liberation — anointed Jihad by the Afghans. The resistance was widespread and included most members of the Afghan population. While, the devastation of Afghanistan and its population of sixteen million was extensive, thirty years later Afghans still explain with pride that they participated in the jihad and expelled a superpower from their country.

The successes and weaknesses of the resistance movements were closely linked to the methods employed by elites to mobilize the ordinary people. Afghans perceive their history as one that extends many centuries, and during the course of history they have developed several identities. Islam is one such identity, although Islam is also a historically new ideology in

Afghanistan. The time honored institutions of the jirga and Pashtunwali predate Islam. Nevertheless, Islam plays an important role in this debate. In the Afghan psyche, Islam is perceived as authentic, ancient, glorious, and pure. Most importantly, Islam is synonymous with justice. Islam is the refuge for the people. During periods of national crises, both political and religious elites, regardless of their own personal associations with the religion, borrow powerful symbols from this faith in the hope that close affiliation with Islam would immunize them from public reproach. Chapters 3 and 4 illustrated the role of religion in the mobilization of the Afghans when the country was invaded by foreign armies. National elites guided the Afghans to launch a resistance against the British during the Anglo-Afghan Wars of the nineteenth century. Similarly, the Soviet invasion and occupation was also challenged with country-wide resistance. In both cases, Afghans expelled the occupiers from their land.

Political elites utilize Islam in an attempt to construct a nationalist myth. In this myth, one group of political elites claims political legitimacy and authenticity. In their bid to appear legitimate and authentic in the psyche of the people, leaders exert great energy to proclaim that their mission in safeguarding the nation is a sacred duty. They justify their actions and policies as a necessary means to defend the nation and its people, whom they overtly perceive as one extended family or (umma). This exertion is particularly obvious during moments of political, economic and social instabilities in the country. The country's political elites, not unlike other elites, take advantage of national crises and claim they are exclusively the legitimate guardians of Islam and Afghan national identity. This guardianship is presented in the context of extending protection to Afghans whom leaders identify as extended family members who are related to each other not only through kinship ties, but also through their shared experiences of victory,

hardship and abuse at the hands of unjust and corrupt leaders. The current rhetorical battle between the Taliban movement and the Karzai regime is waged within this very context.

The Taliban compete for the hearts and minds of the Afghan population by attempting to sully the Karzai regime as an un-Islamic, inauthentic, corrupt government, an administration compromised by foreign forces. Daily statements released by the Taliban spokesperson, Zabiullah Mujahid assert the Taliban's position regarding the Kabul regime. The Taliban is virulent in its criticism of the government, and rejects both the internal presence of the occupation and a negotiated political settlement in Afghanistan. They claim that the establishment in Kabul is not committed to the Afghans or Islam; therefore, it is unacceptable to make an alliance with them. The Taliban have created a sophisticated communication system that demonstrates an increasingly confident movement. The movement's leadership has successfully tapped into Afghan nationalism and repeatedly exploits the policy failures of the central government and its foreign supporters. This assault on the frail government apparatus results in weakening public support for the policies emerging from Kabul, even though few Afghans actively support the Taliban. Hence, the central government and its foreign allies are charged with the responsibility of making a concerted and genuine effort, through their words as well as their actions, to address sources of alienation addressed in Taliban propaganda. In particular, the Karzai government and the foreign occupation must curtail arbitrary arrests and the killing of civilians.

On January 31, 2006, Hamid Karzai addressed the delegates of the London Conference on Afghanistan. Presidents Karzai's speeches are available in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's website ([www.president.gov.af](http://www.president.gov.af)). He began his speech by thanking the

international community for “extending generous support to my country in our time of need” (Karzai 2006). He listed the central government’s accomplishments and asserted that four years after the Bonn Conference, the people of Afghanistan have made remarkable achievements in the direction of “peace, stability and democracy” (*Ibid.*). It is important to note that it was the Bonn Conference that anointed Karzai as president of Afghanistan.

In December 2002, shortly after the Taliban were dispersed, Washington selected a group of Afghans who later met under United Nations auspices in Bonn (Kolhatkar & Ingalls 2006: 97). Nearly all delegates to the Bonn Conference were “stakeholders” in Afghanistan’s previous governments (*Ibid.*). A significant outcome of the conference resulted in the United Nations establishing the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The ISAF consisted of 5,000 troops and was tasked with the daunting responsibility of maintaining security in Afghanistan (Kolhatkar & Ingalls 2006: 98-99). However, the ISAF authority was confined to Kabul, leaving the other provinces to the discretion of local warlords.

President Karzai’s 2006 speech is quite reverential graciously thanking the foreigners that placed him in power. The 2006 London Conference was a strategic opportunity to obfuscate Afghanistan’s political realities. The United States invasion and subsequent occupation had reached its four-year anniversary and there was precious little the United States, the international community and Afghanistan’s central government could term success. Nevertheless, Karzai (2006) attributed “our successes to the resilience and unfailing determination of the Afghan people as well as the generous support of the international community.” He continued: “Today Afghanistan has a constitution, an elected President and an elected Parliament. We are proud that women make up more than a quarter of seats in our National Assembly. Where four years ago,

education was in a state of total collapse, today more than six million girls and boys are attending schools” (*Ibid.*).

A comprehensive analysis of the Taliban’s public statements has several limits. The Taliban go through great lengths to highlight their successes, or frequently “imagined” successes, and presents itself as having pure aims, while simultaneously presenting their failures and weaknesses in a convoluted manner. They seldom address their acts of brutality. Regardless, studying the Taliban public statements provides researchers with an opportunity to learn about the methods the movement deems effective in terms of recruiting and projecting its legitimacy amongst supporters and potential sympathizers.

The movement projects itself as a product of the Jihad against the Soviet occupation and the ensuing civil war that fragmented Afghanistan. While the Taliban’s roots are Pashtun-based, in recent years its appeal and prominence has increased in other regions of the country. Interestingly while local support has grown for the Taliban, they are still dependent upon seeking refuge in Pakistan. The movement is linked with transnational groups for mainly pragmatic reasons. However, the connection with outside groups appears to challenge the unity of the movement as international networks have a global agenda and the Taliban’s first concern is with the country’s internal affairs — most specifically, the withdrawal of foreign forces.

For example Mullah Mohammad Omar addressed a congregation of people on November 25, 2009. His speech was filled with strategic concepts and terminology. His speech was inclusive; he thanked the entire Muslim umma for “their positive response to the Call of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and for their foiling the American melodrama by avoiding participation in the American process under the name of elections.” Mulla Omar referenced the

2009 presidential elections. In the same speech, Mohammad Omar continued: “I firmly believe, if the Mujahid people remain constant in their multi-sided and honest help (with Mujahideen), the Almighty Allah will expose and thwart all conspiracies of the enemy one after another. It is due to your selfless sacrifices that the arrogant enemy is facing both defeat, jittery and disgrace” (Omar 2009)

The Taliban claim they are the legitimate leadership of Afghanistan and protector of the authentic Afghan national identity under attack from Karzai’s government as well as his foreign accomplices. They claim they are battling against two sets of imperialists — one group of imperialists emerged within Afghanistan’s own borders and the other from afar. Both treated the country and the community of the Islamic umma. In successive speeches the Taliban leadership strongly encourage the Afghans to continue their “legitimate” Jihad and support the Mujahideen struggle to protect and safeguard Islamic ideals, help the Mujahideen financially and show and compassion to the families of the “martyrs” and prisoners as well as taking every opportunity to disobey the Kabul administration (Omar 2009). These components of the Taliban speeches prioritize the essential principles of Islamic social responsibility and justice.

The Taliban is quick to draw parallels between the United States and the Soviet Union. On a daily basis the Taliban releases public statements, arguing that the current Afghan Jihad is an extension of the struggle against Afghanistan’s corrupt leadership. In addition, the Taliban claim that western countries are destroying Islam. For example, the movement’s leadership asserts that the foreign invaders are not interested in negotiations that would lead to a sovereign Afghanistan. On the contrary, the foreign armies intend to “prolong their evil process of colonization and occupation” (Omar 2009). These are the arguments they present in their

conversations with the leadership in Afghanistan and express in their *shabnameh* (night letters) distributed to local radio and television stations or disseminated throughout the countryside. The Taliban leaders claim that they are the rightful guardians of Islam. Therefore, the burden of proof rests heavily upon the shoulders of Karzai and his government who must convince the public of their cultural authenticity and moral authority to lead the nation.

However, Karzai's administration appears to have insurmountable obstacles in its path to appear legitimate and capable to address the numerous needs of the population. On January 1, 2006, he outlined his "national development strategy" (Karzai 2006). He stated that his administration would work to address the priorities identified in the national development strategy with the support of the international community. The speech appeared to be, primarily, for the benefit of the international community; the Afghans were secondary. One has only to read the words of the transcript closely to realize this. Karzai directs his speech to the power brokers in the international community. He is pragmatic in that he realizes he must appease the United States and Britain first, and he selects his words accordingly. Karzai argues that terrorism is to blame for the country's lack of security. He does not mention that international forces bomb and conduct night raids in villages resulting in civilian deaths. They employ protocols that violate the Afghans' fundamental rights. For example, (Kolhatkar& Ingalls2006: 51), report that human rights organizations document the United States brutal military campaigns in Afghanistan. They highlight the incident that occurred on October 21, 2001, in which twenty-three civilians, many of them children, were killed by bombing campaigns on Thori village (*Ibid*). The bombings took place in a sequence of three episodes and occurred from 10 p.m. and 1:00 a.m. (*Ibid*). Karzai appears powerless in the face of such atrocities committed against the population. In his speech,

he does not request that the foreign forces must perform their duties in an accountable and transparent manner. On the contrary, Karzai argues that on the “security front, fighting terrorism, in close conjunction with the active military presence in Afghanistan of the international community is our priority” (Karzai 2006). For example, he continues:

We understand that lasting peace and security in Afghanistan will ultimately depend on building effective and capable institutions of governance. Through developing institutional capacities of the state, we will enforce the rule of law and ensure the protection of the rights of our people. We will expedite administrative and judicial reforms, remove red-tape, create an efficient and transparent administration, and fight corruption and nepotism. Building a modern state capable of delivering services to its people is dependent upon a skilled and educated workforce. (Karzai 2006)

The debate between the political elites is not accidental; rather, it is a strategic and politically pragmatic assertion contrived on the part of the Karzai administration and the Taliban elites to appear as though they are protecting the integrity of Afghans while at the same time holding the moral and legal basis of Islam in high regard. The following excerpts are from Mohammad Omar’s famous November 2009 speech in [TheUnjustMedia.com](http://TheUnjustMedia.com). He illustrates the political and moral positioning of the Taliban. Mohammad Omar calls upon the Mujahideen to maintain discipline. In an attempt to bless the Jihad, he consoles the Mujahideen that “Your victory over the invading disbelievers is the result of the Divine help” (Omar 2009). He elaborates that if the Mujahideen wish to please God, then they must and “make the service of common people your objective, Allah (SWT) will bestow on you His ever growing blessing.”

Mohammad Omar stresses the importance of remaining faithful to the service of the religion and the people, and the firm believe in this conviction ascertain that the “enemy” will lose their hearts and you will have the honor to defeat the greatest colonialist power of this century” (Omar 2009). Mohammad Omar gives the following crucial command to the Mujahideen and stipulates the rules of engagement: “It is the Islamic responsibility of every believing man to avoid causing casualty to common people. There is no justification in Sharia for murder and injury of common people, nor is there any room for such a deed in our sacred religion” (*Ibid.*).

Currently, Islam is used as a strategic political tool, hence lending a religious coloring to the contentions between the Taliban and the Karzai government. However, upon close examination, it is apparent that both groups are vying to gain the attention of Afghans, and that the debate is less about religion and more about politics. Both Karzai and the Taliban are attempting to gain legitimacy by projecting an image of authenticity, “Afghan-ness,” and rightful guardianship of Islam.

For example, the Taliban’s shadow government challenges the authority of the central government and operates parallel to the incompetent government institutions by providing judges to dispense judgment and a police force to provide security. The Taliban’s leadership claims that the well-being and prosperity of the people should be prioritized. This is a very pragmatic objective and one with popular resonance. Similarly, Mohammad Omar, in his November 2009 speech encouraged Afghans to demonstrate deference to their elders and other influential personalities and show compassion to the younger generation. This order is well received in a society time honored traditions as one’s elders are respected. Mohammad Omar states, “Observe true justice when you are authorized to dispense to a deserving person his due right. Implement

the Regulation of the Code of Conduct of the Islamic Emirate and observe other principles in order to ensure achievement of ever-increasing advancement in the affairs of Jihad” (Omar 2009).

The most powerful symbolic tool in the hands of the Taliban is the foreign occupation, and they demand that the people of Afghanistan must reject the 42-country coalition’s military control of the country. The Taliban have at their disposal numerous examples of grievances and they do not hesitate to highlight these abuses. For example, they speak about night raids, involving the desecration of the Quran and other serious misconduct against civilians, in particular women. The practices of night raids comprise intrusions into private homes at night, interactions with members of the family, including women, children and the elderly, and hence abusing the notion that one’s home is sacrosanct. Hence, it is important to reference Partha Chatterjee’s book the “Nation and Its Fragments” and how the Indian / Bangla elites from the period of British rule sought to distinguish the public realm dominated by the westerners and the “inner sanctum” (the home) where the Nation was kept pure (Chatterjee 1993). These foreign soldiers disregard fundamental notions of privacy and their actions blatantly disregard the protection of the civilian population. Furthermore, the absence of accountability on the part of the occupying forces encourages ordinary individuals to join the Taliban resistance. On January 15, 2010, the Taliban released a statement titled: “Response of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Concerning the Desecration of the Holy Quran and the Martyrdom of Innocent Civilians” (Taliban 2010). The Taliban voiced the following grievance: “Americans have been trampling down on religious, social, cultural and economic rights of the people under the notorious name of War on Terror in order to bring people under their colonialist tentacles” (*Ibid*).

In addition, the Taliban assert that the Karzai regime is un-Islamic, inauthentic, corrupt and, most importantly, incompetent. The September 2010 parliamentary elections were a debacle not only for the central government but also the foreign regimes that support it. For example, On September 22, 2010 the Taliban released a statement titled “Whom the Afghan People Sided With? With the Islamic Emirate or...?” (Taliban 2010.). In the previously mentioned statement the Taliban take great pride in the reality that while the Central government as well as the West predicted a 30% turnout, less than 10% of the population participated in the “ridiculous American drama by casting their votes” (*Ibid*). The reason for this discrepancy was attributed to fear and lack of security and “widespread rigging” (*Ibid*).

Despite the low voter turnout, Karzai made a rare public appearance; he is rarely photographed outside the presidential palace. On September 18, 2010, President Karzai left the sanctuary of his palace walls to cast his vote in Afghanistan’s parliamentary elections. The president stated that he was pleased to vote in the elections and urged members of the public to join him. The following excerpts are obtained from the office of the president’s website, (Karzai 2010). Karzai stated: “Please come out of your homes and use your right in determining the destiny of your country and move your country another step forward towards progress” (*Ibid*). Karzai described September 18, a day of prosperity when the people are exercising their constitutional rights to achieve a democratic government (*Ibid*).

The lack of security permeates every level of society; that includes the members of government as well as candidates for office. The Taliban point to this embarrassing fact. On September 16, 2010, the Taliban posted a statement titled “Statement of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Regarding the Misleading Process Under the Name of Parliamentary Elections”

challenged that even members of the government and hopeful candidates cannot seek refuge from the bombs of the foreign forces (Taliban 2010). “Similarly, those persons who are now active members of the so-called parliament as representatives of the people, have been beaten and wounded by the Americans more than a dozen times and their houses have been raided frequently (*Ibid*). The September 16, 2010, Taliban statement continues, “So when the representatives of the people (members of parliament) are themselves at risk of being killed and beaten by the Americans and their houses are raided, then how the representatives will be able to live up to the expectations of the people and fulfill the promises which they have made to the public during electioneering” (*Ibid*). An important point of the above statement identifies that the individuals who claim to be representatives of the people conduct their election campaigns from Kabul, and hence they are not aware of the realities of the population living in the provinces. The distance between government officials and the population leads to mistrust and is not conducive to solving popular grievances. Hence, from the perspective of the Taliban, the burden of proof is on Karzai’s government. The government is now obliged to dismantle the Taliban’s assertions that indeed the regime in Kabul is autonomous, authentic, just and Afghan. It is imperative for the government to establish political legitimacy.

The Taliban assert that they are an organic movement and in close association with the people of Afghanistan. They dismiss Karzai as a foreign-installed puppet who is confined to his palace unaware of the realities of the turmoil in his country. Therefore, Karzai’s visits to the provinces become a great public relations opportunity. On January 2, 2010, Karzai, accompanied by his Minister of Defense and Interior Minister, traveled to Lashkarga the capital of the volatile Helmand Province. Daoud Ahmadi, the spokesperson of the governor of Helmand appeared on

the Pashtu Program of the Voice of America and explained the purpose of the president's visit.

Ahmadi stated:

The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan met with foreign generals in Helmand in order to ascertain [whether] they would continue to provide the government with funding. In addition, he attended a majlis or assembly of people comprised of tribal elders, prominent members of the ulama, and provincial members of the governing council. The members of the majlis asserted that they are happy with the central government, and that the people of Helmand will cooperate with the president, and that they will not join the enemy [Taliban]. The attendants further explained that security is improved and the reconstruction of the province is successful and the young people of the province enjoy life. President Karzai urged the elders to convince the youth in Helmand to join the Afghan National Army and the police force, and to reject the Taliban. (Ahmadi 2010)

Ahmadi's statement is typical of the government members' attempt to dispel the notion that the regime in Kabul is internally weak and appears vulnerable. Thus, he dismissed the suggestion that it is incompetent to govern a divided population. On the same day, parliament challenged Karzai's list for the new Afghan Cabinet. The parliamentarians rejected seventeen candidates, and seven others were confirmed with great difficulty. Nesar Abdiani, the host of the Pashtu program, *Kegdai na Ter Spogmai* (From the Tent to the Moon). He lamented that the challenge with confirming the cabinet was the direct result of the existence national disunity, ethnic, linguistic, and regional divisions, and that the government in Kabul does not have a plan

to appease the different groups (Abdiani 2010). He asserted that milipikhlawana (national reconciliation) is missing from the national debate (*Ibid.*).

Afghan elites use various media to disseminate their political messages. It is worthwhile to examine media sources both inside Afghanistan and outside. One such source is *The Afghan Post* a monthly newspaper published in both Dari and Pashtu. A prestigious Dari publication titled *The Afghanistan Mirror* is a reliable and non-aligned source of information. Both publications present a sophisticated analysis of news and events regarding Afghanistan. Increasingly, politically active groups are trying to reach the public via television. Since, most of the population of Afghanistan is illiterate, television programs play an important role in the dissemination of information. Television programs are broadcast both in Afghanistan and within the expatriate Afghan communities. Television sets are widely available in many households in Afghanistan. Afghans outside the country are also tuned into Afghan current events. In the United States a total of five Afghan television stations are available via satellite. Two channels are broadcast from Afghanistan. Ariana is a privately owned station and Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) is the state owned station. Ariana-Afghan, Payam-i- Afghan, and Noor television are broadcast from California and provide an important venue for the voices of the Afghan Diaspora.

The aforementioned television channels broadcast programs that discuss political, economic, and social matters. Most specifically, the three main themes of the programs are about foreign occupation, security concerns and corruption, important themes that define the predicament of the Karzai regime. The evening news in both Pashtu and Dari, relay detailed information of the country's events, specifically the daily RTA news which frequently presents

the public statement of President Karzai and the government of Afghanistan. In addition, Ariana television's programs: Didga, Leedlori and the evening news are significant. Noor television channel provides a weekly political discussion titled Da Kegdai na ter Spogmai. The director of Ariana-Afghan channel, Nabil Miskinyaar hosts a daily program titled Niga. This is a two to three hour program broadcasted in Dari from Los Angeles. The program invites guests who are well-versed in Afghan politics to hold an open forum. A portion of the program is dedicated to receiving questions from the public, where individuals from any part of the world may call to either ask a question, add to the debate or to bring attention to an issue previously neglected. This program is unique in the sense that such a program gives a voice to members of the Afghan Diaspora.

Similarly, the director of Payam-i-Afghan, Omar Khitab also hosts a daily program, titled Spini Khabiri, or Sukhani Uryan. Guests of this program are parliamentarians, Afghan scholars, legal experts, journalists and active members of civil society. A frequent guest of the program is the respected Afghan journalist Enayat Shariff who joins the program via telephone. The program begins with an overview of the daily news, and then is expanded to include the expertise of the guests.

The programs broadcast from Afghanistan have the unique value of reporting on important issues from close proximity. Arian television's program Didga (Observations) is important. The host of the program is Mohammed Naseer Fayaz. Mr. Fayaz has won quite a reputation for conducting his interviews with government officials and members of the Afghan civil society. He sheds light upon the deteriorating security conditions in Afghanistan, and the increase in government corruption.

The ordinary Afghan is the target of these elites, and they are constantly in a struggle to appeal to the population. It is important for them to appear legitimate in the eyes of the population. Various programs, such as Chasham Andaz, Didga, Leedlori, Spini Khabiri Niga, confirm the central hypothesis that the current conflict in Afghanistan is not about “Islam,” rather it is about the occupation, continued years of war and violence, and a lack of genuine efforts to implement necessary socio-economic and political reforms. It is important to note that while the battle is not about Islam, “Islam” is a tool utilized by the elites to forge a new Afghan identity — an identity that benefits these ethnic entrepreneurs. For example, a content analysis of the political speeches of the Taliban leadership as well as the Karzai administration supplemented by the following selected television programs: Didga, Chasham Andaz, Leedlori, Khairana, Spini Khabiri or Sukhani Uryan indicate that the battle in Afghanistan is not waged for Islam, rather, a group of strategic political actors are using Islam to promote their political causes.

Let us examine the predicament of President Karzai and his administration. A great challenge to his legitimacy is the presence of the foreign occupation and lack of law and order. The continuing deteriorating conditions in security, the lack of law and order excessive corruption, the brutality of the foreign occupation has compromised the status of the government, made it vulnerable to attacks, and increased the rhetorical battle between the Taliban and the central government. The website UnjustMedia.Com posted a strategic statement on November 2009. Mohammad Omar (November 2009) stated, Stop oppressing and torturing your miserable Muslim people as a sign of your service and slavery to the non-believing invaders. The foreign invaders are not benefactors of the Afghan people. They are bent on wiping out the belief and

holy places of this people and want to bring under their belly all our material wealth. They use the empty slogans of development and reconstruction of Afghanistan for realization of their illegitimate objectives” (*Ibid.*). Mohammad Omar continues, “I call on you all as I did last time and as per my responsibility, to put an end to your life of humiliation; shun hostility with your people and join the Mujahideen in the strongholds of pride, honor and belief instead of continuing with your present life of debasement” (*Ibid.*).

Karzai has occasionally addressed the onslaught on civilians. When addressing the concerns regarding the military activities of the foreign forces he is cautious in the selection of his words. On Aug. 19, 2006, he addressed a delegation of Afghans. August 19 was an auspicious day in history; it marked the 87<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Afghanistan’s independence from the British. The President began his address with carefully-selected words evoking memories of a proud Afghanistan, albeit from a bygone era. As Ernest Renan (1990: 19) said over a century ago: “A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea.” In a bid to invoke that past Karzai stated, “Afghanistan proudly gained independence from foreign influence under the capable leadership of Ghazi Amanullah Khan. Her brave sons and daughters fought with fierce determination against servitude to outside powers” (Karzai 2006). There is a particular irony in Karzai’s speech. He spoke vehemently against British threat to the independence of Afghanistan during the early part of the twentieth century; yet, he does not acknowledge that Afghanistan is currently an occupied state. He does, however, discreetly address the military activities of these foreign forces. He states, “The Coalition forces fighting the war on terror in Afghanistan occasionally make mistakes and hurt innocent people when conducting operations. We are

working to reduce these errors and stress that any counter-terrorism efforts must first be coordinated with Afghan security forces” (*Ibid.*). He continues, “We have also held serious talks with coalition forces about respecting the cultural and religious values of our people. We want the perverse bombings and night searches of homes to end. I and other security officials in the government are deeply involved in this issue on a daily basis” (*Ibid.*).

On Friday, March 5, 2010, Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) announced that the Taliban attacked Ansari Square. Ansari Square is a large shopping center located in Kabul and the attack in the heart of the capital was a blatant effort to undermine the Kabul regime and demonstrated the reality that the foreign forces armed with the greatest military might are vulnerable and do not even effectively govern the capital . The attack killed and injured many Afghans, caused millions in property damages, and created a security vacuum in Kabul for hours. It is important to note that ordinary Afghans respond to the fact that the Taliban are also killing them. Yes, the foreign forces are killing; but the Taliban are engaged in the same bloodshed and hence, the Afghans resent both parties. The Taliban are political pragmatist and realize that the leadership must address this publicly. As political pragmatists, they realize that they cannot justify the killing of civilians, and in their public statements, they concentrate on their victories. The Taliban promptly released a statement on Saturday March 06, 2010. “The recent attack of five armed heroes of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan at Ansari Square, in the heart of the Kabul city, on last Friday substantiated once again that Mujahideen can daringly target important centers of the internal hireling enemy by successfully evading their security and intelligence checkpoints, still more to kill a number of internal puppet soldiers and foreign

nationals as well as injure many others” (Taliban 2010). The statement concluded with the promise that the occupiers of Afghanistan should expect other similar attacks.

The Taliban have addressed the foreign forces on many occasions. In November 2009, Mohammad Omar addressed a portion of his famous speech to the White House stating that the realities in Afghanistan indicate that the United States and its “allied invaders” will fail in Afghanistan and defeat cannot be averted by military force or “irrational strategies” (Omar 2009). Mohammad Omar asked the following question: “These are the people who before you, have wiped out two empires – the British and Russians empires- from the map of the world” (*Ibid.*).

The Taliban claim guardianship of the Afghan state, people and religion. They borrow cultural traits and symbols, and appeal to the emotions of the Afghan masses in an attempt to demarcate boundaries between themselves and others. They assert that the occupying forces are in Afghanistan to extinguish the people of the region and Islam. Their words appear to resonate with the Afghans who are faced daily with the hardships and injustices of the occupation. The Taliban address the fact that the regime is not able to protect the population from house searches, and bombardments, and these facts are deployed to challenge the Karzai regime legitimacy. On Friday January 1, 2010, thirty tribal elders traveled from Loya Paktia (Greater Paktia and Paktika Provinces) to Kabul to meet with Karzai, the Attorney General, strategic members of the Afghan Parliament, and cabinet ministers. The national television (RTA) covered the event and the following excerpts are obtained from RTA. The gathering or majlis was a response to U.S. forces activities in their community. The following is the emotional description of attack on the village in Haji Hairan’s (a villager) words:

At two in the morning U.S. and NATO tanks arrived and stopped in front of the village mosque. Three individuals were spending the night in the mosque: one was the proprietor of the mosque, who looked after the mosque and received food from the local villagers in return for his guardianship of the mosque. The second individual spending the night in the mosque was a homeless individual, who received food from the villagers and spent most of his nights in the mosques. The third individual was a shepherd (*Ibid.*).

Haji Hairan continued, saying that:

The inhabitants of the mosque were taken out of the mosque and the shepherd was “martyred” in front of the mosque. After which point the Americans released their dogs on his recently slain body. They (NATO and U.S. soldiers) watched the dogs consume the shepherd’s face(*Ibid.*).

Haji Mohammad, also accompanied Haji Hairan from their village and asserted that his village is willing to cooperate with the Karzai government; he beseeched Karzai to send his authorities and search the homes in the village. He promised if the authorities discovered weapons or anti-government material, then the government should dispense the appropriate punishment. He continued that the villagers would only cooperate with the government only if the government listened. If the government continued to neglect them, they would not have any other recourse but to join the Taliban. Karzai, listened avidly to his guests and he stated: “your pain is the national pain, you are not the only people suffering at the hands of the foreign forces, the whole country is punished, and I have asked them repeatedly to stop the killing of the civilians.” (Karzai 2010).

In fact, human security in military and economic terms eludes Afghanistan, and these conditions challenge the legitimacy of the central government. Suicide bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations, and NATO and ISAF military raids plague the population in the countryside in Afghanistan and the major cities. This abuse of the ordinary Afghans is not a recent occurrence. On November 2008, The Afghan Post, reported that U.S. military forces “abused” the residents of Balkh Province (Mohammad, 2008). In a military campaign, foreign forces attacked the village of Khan Abad in the district of Chahar Bolak on the night of October 10, 2008; ten village residents were beaten. The reason for this event was undisclosed. The paper reported that foreign forces do not collaborate with the Afghan National Army and their activities are frequently shrouded in mystery. The newspaper continued that Ata Mohammad, the governor of Balkh Province appeared in a media conference, and stated “that foreign forces pursue military activities according to their own whim and do not consult Afghan security forces”. (*Ibid.*)he governor called the attack on the civilians “barbaric”, and continued, “I recommend to the people that in the event that such an attack is repeated, the people should expel foreign forces with the use of sticks and stones” (*Ibid.*).

The lack of coordination and accountability of foreign forces was illustrated by another event that characterized the weaknesses of the central government. The event sent shock waves through the internal Afghan media as well as the political programs on Arian, Noor and Payami-Afghan television stations. Extensive reporting conveyed that on Monday December 28, 2009, foreign forces raided a village in Kunar Province. Local villagers stated that 10 children from the community were killed in the raid — the youngest was a sixth-grade student. NATO and American forces spokespersons rejected the allegation and responded that the raid was directed

against the Taliban and the casualties were Taliban. The government representative Assadullah Wafa conducted an inquiry, and confirmed that indeed the casualties were schoolchildren. This attack awakened the Afghan populations of the eastern provinces, and thousands of people participated in demonstrations condemning this act. The Afghan news programs showed footage of the demonstrations with the participation of diverse groups, including university students, educators, the ulama, merchants and farmers. These groups had joined together and were chanting anti-Karzai, anti-U.S. slogans and burning effigies of Barak Obama. The Afghan news programs showed that the demonstrators made religious slogans as well. The demonstrations were yet another example that Islam is not a separate entity confined to the mosque and cut off from social and political life. They engage in active resistance to the occupation because the occupation does not only affect the land, in their mind, it also aims to uproot Islam. At the same time, they realize that challenging this foreign occupation is a duty and that they cannot resist on their own and they must maintain an alliance with other factions. One month previous to this tragedy, Mohammad Omar lamented: "Every day, our youths, old men, women and children are martyred by your bombs and rounds of mortars. The invaders raid houses of our people at night. They destroy our green gardens, public properties, educational and commercial centers" (Omar 2009).

The previous chapter contested the assertion made by western scholars and policy makers alike that the Taliban movement is, strictly speaking, a religious movement. This chapter addresses the contestations between the Taliban and the Karzai government. The two parties will be compared along the following themes: corruption, morality, portrayal of history, cultural authenticity (Pashtun), strategic manipulation of religion.

### **Taliban versus Karzai**

Since 2001, the country has continued to spiral into anarchy. This lack of law and order has forced ordinary citizens to take to the streets, and in 2003 Afghans held the first anti-U.S. demonstration in Kabul. The lack of security was one of the main contentions. The protesters included government employees and university students who complained of growing insecurity, slow post-war reconstruction and delays in salary payments by Hamid Karzai's U.S.-backed government. News coverage on Ariana television brought the scene home to many households within Afghanistan and the households of Afghans living abroad. The demonstration was organized by the respected philosopher Sediq Afghan, who has become famous for his vocal denunciations of illegitimate governments in Kabul. Incidentally, Professor Afghan was a veteran of organized demonstrations against the communist regime of the 1980s, the Mujahideen governments that replaced it, and also the Taliban. Similarly, during the autumn of 2009, Afghans in major cities participated in demonstrations against the United States government. Through mainly non-violent demonstrations, they expressed their grievances regarding the story they had heard, that American and European forces were desecrating the Quran. However, several political experts were quick to comment that while the Afghans were genuinely concerned about the desecration of the Quran.

In Afghanistan, there is a deficit of law and order, and security is all but nonexistent. Government corruption, an increase in poppy cultivation, and kidnappings prevail. Billions of dollars of aid money combined with the presence of powerful foreign military forces has failed to make the Afghan government more representative and to disarm the warlords. On the contrary

many of the warlords, notorious for committing atrocities against the Afghans were allowed to return to their predatory ways. The political, economic, and security instability ensuing as a result of the U.S. occupation provided them with ample opportunities to become involved in financially lucrative schemes, such as drug trade, human trafficking, exploitation of natural resources Afghan satellite channels, Ariana-Afghanistan, and Payam-i-Afghan present political discussion programs on a daily basis. For example, Ariana-Afghanistan's two main programs Niga, and As Gup Gup Maikheza are hosted by Nabil Gh. Miskinyar. Payam-i-Afghan's Sukhan -i-Uryan three hour daily program is hosted by Omar Khitab. The forum for both television programs is a brief discussion of the political realities of Afghanistan and the region, after which point the programs are open to the public and individuals call to the program from many regions of the world. After following these two channels broadcast their programs from Los Angeles, one becomes familiar with the main themes of the program.

There are candid discussions concerning the following issues: American strategic aims in Afghanistan appear distorted and United States national security interests subvert the commitment to support a representative national government and development in Afghanistan. Niga, As Gup Gup Mikhaiza, and Sukhani Uryan programs assert that the Taliban strength has increased since 2001, because the United States opted for a heavy-handed military campaign in Afghanistan (Miskinyar & and Khitab 2010). As a result, the Taliban movement ideologically aligned itself with al-Qaeda whose links with international organizations have transformed the movement's early weaknesses and shortcomings into a force that challenges the military might of the world's only superpower. The commentators on the political programs assert that the United States and NATO's success in stabilizing Afghanistan for global and regional security is

imperative. A policy that maintains a focus on both political and economic dimensions must take precedence. Occasionally the discussions incorporate the importance of Islam in society and politics in Afghanistan, however, the programs maintain a focus on the Afghan government's weaknesses: corruption, nepotism, and the failure of the regime in Kabul to secure the country.

### **Corruption**

Corruption is prevalent in Afghanistan. Corruption encompasses the misuse of public funds for reconstructive purposes, the appointment of unmerited individuals to high ranking positions in government and the prevalent use of bribery by the ordinary Afghans.

Sajia is the host of a program on Ariana-Afghanistan Television. Her program is broadcast on Sundays from 2:00 until 3:30 pm. She is vociferous in expressing her grievances against the Karzai administration, and she provides an opportunity for many Afghans around the country to call her show and speak in a candid fashion about the hardships they experience. On Sunday, December 20, 2009 Ariana Afghan Television broadcast her concern regarding President Karzai's December 15 speech on corruption (Sajia 2009). She exclaimed that she was "outraged that Karzai was quite audacious in that he stood in front of members of his government, and spoke about the prevalence of insecurity and corruption in the country" (*Ibid.*). She quoted Karzai's statement that on any night a government employee can be taken out of his house, bribed or killed. Such an explanation of events insinuates that the government in Kabul does not have strength to protect its citizens. An additional source of concern was the president's own explanation that government officials in Afghanistan, after one year of work have enough money to purchase a home, a car, and take their families on vacations to Dubai. Officially, the

government does not pay a salary that would accommodate such a lifestyle. While the president spoke of these corrupt individuals, he did not identify any one by name. However, several cabinet ministers were sitting next to him — individuals complicit in the allocation of state resources for their own personal use. Several have built impressive mansions in the last few years. Administrative corruption has become an eight-year-old problem in Afghanistan, placing the country on the list of ineffective governments of the world. Corruption permeates all government departments from top-down.

In addition, foreign aid organizations are immersed in corruption as well. The donations made by foreign countries to the Afghan government through NGOs are sent abroad in the form of exorbitant salaries paid to ex-patriots as well as foreigners employed in Afghanistan. Afghans complain that Afghanistan has enough skilled workers to fill the various positions, and that the government should invest money into programs that would train local Afghans rather than hiring workers from overseas. A United Nations report released on January 19, addressed the high level of corruption that exist in Afghanistan. The head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Antonio Maria Costa, explained that more than half of the population has to pay exorbitant bribes nearly on a daily basis (Costa 2006). The report focused on bribes paid out during the last 12 months for everything from crossing a checkpoint to facilitating the country's drug trade and human trafficking (*Ibid.*). Mr. Costa warned that if corruption is not tackled the Afghans could likely lose faith in the international communities' efforts, resulting in dire consequences (*Ibid.*).

### **The Taliban Shadow Government**

Nearly all of Afghanistan's provinces have two governors. One is appointed by President Karzai, and supported by thousands of U.S. troops. The official governor administers the province by day. The evening news is full of ribbon cutting ceremonies of new development projects, and laying the foundation stones for clinics, schools and libraries. However, an update of the projects is never provided, and many of the initiated projects never reach fruition. A certainty is that the local governors treat the provinces' foreign assistance budget as their own personal coffers. The population of Afghanistan may not agree with the Taliban ideology, but many complain about the local government officials' demand for bribes in return for allowing them to conduct their lives. After nine years of Karzai's government, Afghans are turning to the Taliban.

The Taliban leader Mohammad Omar appoints the second governor of Afghanistan's Provinces. The shadow governor enters the province discreetly at night. The Taliban governor issues orders and decisions on The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan stationary, explaining attacks against the central government forces and fires any Taliban official even remotely associated with corruption. The Taliban leadership is immersed in the discreet preparation for what they perceive is inevitable, their return to power. The Taliban preparation includes establishing a shadow government of governors, police chiefs, district administrators and judges. These officials have greater relevance in the daily lives of ordinary citizens than the official government in Kabul. In fact most news programs and political analysts in Afghanistan assert that the Taliban are effective in 85% of the country. The upcoming 18 months are of great strategic importance to the central government as well as its prominent patron, the United States in establishing the authority of the Karzai administration. The challenge is that Afghans prefer

the strict but decisive authority of the Taliban to the corruption and inefficiency of the public officials. Islamic law is always quicker, and the judgment is dispensed immediately. Afghans resort to Taliban courts because they argue that if they bring their case to the government courts, bureaucracy, nepotism and corruption delay the case for one or two years, or perhaps is never resolved at all. With the Taliban it takes an hour to hear the final verdict. Karzai asserts that he is an advocate of law and order and security. On July 3, 2007 he attended the Conference on the Rule of Law in Rome: “Our justice system must ensure that the innocent is protected and that the guilty is apprehended and punished appropriately. The Afghan people want an end to impunity and an end to the abuse of authority” (Karzai 2007).

For many Afghans this is the only solution, as large portions of the country are isolated from government jurisdiction, leaving the Taliban as the de facto purveyor of law and order. Hence, the Taliban shadow government collects taxes, conscript fighting men into their movement, and threatens those unwilling to cooperate. There are not clear distinctions between the Taliban fighters and Taliban administrators. Taliban forces are anointed with the responsibility of police chiefs; judges may spend the afternoon hearing cases, and in the evening take up arms and join the resistance to the central government. It is important to note, that the Taliban shadow government illustrate an important component of the Taliban strategy.

After the overthrow of the Taliban government in 2001, a significant percentage of Afghans looked forward to a new regime. They were traumatized by the harsh treatment of women and minorities, the scarcity of government services and international isolation. Certainly, while there is not a marked change in the Taliban ideology, Afghan government officials state that the government has lost the people’s confidence and that Afghans are turning to the Taliban

administrators to solve their problems. This is prominent in Kandahar Province, where residents of the province assert that they are pleased with the Taliban judges. These residents cite the importance of the Taliban expediency as they do not have prisons, and official courts and the swift execution of convicted murderers, rapists and anyone found complicit in aiding central government or the foreign forces is reasonable. The implementation of Shariat is held in high regard to ordinary Afghans because it is their only defense against the atrocities of the government.

### **Cultural Authenticity and the Strategic utilization of Islam**

In Afghanistan, there is a deficit of law and order, and security is nonexistent. Government corruption, an increase in poppy cultivation, and kidnappings prevail. Billions of dollars of aid money combined with the presence of powerful foreign military forces has failed to make the Afghan government accountable to the population, and to neutralize the warlords. The government is in desperate need to assert its authority and maintain order. In the process of extending political authority, the government in Kabul must demonstrate that it is culturally authentic and relevant. Many Afghans are in agreement that the American strategic aims in Afghanistan were distorted and United States national security interests subverted the commitment to support a representative national government and development in Afghanistan. The United States and NATO's success in stabilizing Afghanistan for global and regional security is imperative. A policy that maintains a focus on both political and economic dimensions must take precedence.

The television programs unanimously agree that Islam provides a system of norms, a code regulating human relations, or simply put a social morality. The program guests and commentators agree that Islam must have an important role in Afghanistan's society and politics. Islam is a point of reference to many. This was particularly true during the autumn presidential elections. Ariana television broadcasts its programs from Afghanistan. A program titled election 1388/2009 was broadcast every evening into the homes of Afghans who could afford a television set and more important who had access to electricity. During a period of two months, 40 presidential candidates were interviewed. The candidates were asked questions regarding the role of Islam in Afghan society and politics. Without exception, every single one of the candidates responded that Islam has profound influence in politics and society, and the laws of Afghanistan must be Shariat, the banking systems must also adhere to Islamic principles. For example, the banking systems must be regulated accordingly and prohibit usury. It was obvious from the discussions that the candidates were vulnerable, and wanted to align themselves as closely to Islam as possible in the hopes — a la Nasr's Islamic Leviathan — that some of the legitimacy of the religion would provide a protective cloak for them. Candidates who were closely associated with the United States and other foreign powers specifically articulated strong assertions relating to Islam. Several candidates insisted too much on a purely legalistic interpretation of the religion. Their assertions were reminiscent of certain Orientalist thinking and various members of the ulama or the legal scholars who excessively rely upon Islam a system of rules. At the individual level, Islam also provides the individual with a spiritual dimension; this spiritual component of Islam extends the immediate realities of the individual and allows him access to the universal beyond the everyday rules of community life.

## **Peace and Reconciliation**

During the month of February, in Helmand Province, 500 hundred families were displaced because of the heavy military operation launched by foreign forces. Al-Jazeera news programs confirmed that NATO's chief offensive strategy was to weaken the Taliban leadership to the point where they will be forced to reconcile with the central government. Interestingly, the Helmand Operation is called Musthtarak (cooperation in Pashu and Dari), and American generals as well as the Afghan Defense Minister, Rahim Wardak have gone through great lengths in their assertions that the leading role is in the hands of the Afghan forces, and the foreign forces provide support. However, there is little credibility in this statement as foreign forces conduct the fighting overwhelmingly. This discrepancy is further compounded by the civilian casualties in Helmand. The central government is caught in a serious predicament as it continues to lose credibility and support in Afghanistan. On March 6, 2010, the Taliban issued the following derisive remarks regarding the invasion and occupation of Marja: "the Marjah operations were Obama's peace gift to the residents of Marjah town! In fact, the Mushtarak brutal operations have been launched under the name of establishment of peace in the country" (Taliban 2010). The statement continues: "A well-known Afghan proverb which says, "liars do not remember what they say," aptly applies to the organizers and implementers of these operations (*Ibid.*). The Taliban did not relinquish Marja to the invaders and continued to resist. In the March 6, 2010 statement, the Taliban asserted that the Mujahideen were successful in Marjah and that the foreign forces comprising of 15,000 soldiers and their Afghan allies operating under the name of "together" does not affect the Mujahideen (*Ibid.*). In the same statement, the Taliban

issued a warning that the enemy (i.e. foreign occupying forces) cannot remain safe from the attacks of Mujahideen even in Kabul, the capital of the country (*Ibid.*). The number of civilian casualties appears to alarm Karzai, and he has on several occasions demanded a halt to military raids and the killing of civilians. The constituents of Helmand Province are demanding an end to the onslaught. On April 28, 2010, the Taliban issued a statement titled, “The Truth of the War in Helmand” (Taliban 2010). The Taliban stated, “The alliance and its leaders know well that they can enter Helmand and control it, although this will cost them many casualties and heavy losses. This has been revealed in the first days of the campaign, when many soldiers from NATO and the apostate Afghan army have fallen but have not yet taken control of Helmand, as the enemy states” (*Ibid.*). The statement continues: that when the foreign forces claim that they have killed Taliban, it is later revealed that civilians were the casualties “thereby showing the world the extent of the crimes of those forces, which make no distinction between a civilian and a combatant, because (to them) they are all targets” (*Ibid.*).

Elsewhere in the country, February 2010 was a challenging month for the central government and further eroded its competence to protect Afghans. Afghanistan’s news programs reported on the heavy flooding that washed away 90 houses in Heart Province and caused misery to many. In addition, heavy snows in Faryab Province made life very challenging for many blocking roads and isolating many from basic needs. These events in the face of government inaction demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the central government. As the natural disasters continued to cause the destruction of life and property in Afghanistan, many residents came out to the streets in demonstration format and demanded assistance from the government and the international community. Several non-profit organizations delivered meager assistance to the

residents of Herat and Faryab; however, the Central government and the foreign forces were engaged in weakening the Taliban in Helmand and preparing to launch a similar attack on Qandahar Province later in the spring.

Reconciliation with the Taliban is an important step to establishing authority and legitimacy of the Kabul government. Studio 3 is hosted by Nasir Fayaz, and a well watched program on Ariana Television. On February 6, 2010 the topic of the discussion was peace and reconciliation with the Taliban. The three guests included, Sayed Ishaq Gailani, a member of the Afghan Parliament, Mr. Hamid Elmi deputy spokesperson of Hamid Karzai and Professor Ahmad Saed, an expert on political issues. The topic of the discussion was the London Conference discussion on the status of the Taliban and Karzai's attempts to reconcile with the Taliban in return for peace. The other important issues were the conference of Kabul and the Jirga on peace: the invitation of anti government groups to participate in government invitations and the parliamentary elections. The discussion concentrated on the ideological battle between the Taliban and Karzai's efforts to remove several prominent Taliban from the international black list. Mr. Elmi wanted to shed light upon the discrepancies regarding the London Conference. Are the Taliban merely anti-government parties or are they terrorists? This is a very difficult question to answer, and Mr. Elmi asserted that it must be clarified if "anti-government people are considered terrorists" (Elmi 2010). He explained that Mullah Omar and Ghulbuddin Hekmatyar have both been invited to join the reconciliation talks.

Mr. Sayed Ishaq Gailani voiced his concerns regarding the reconciliation talks. He explained that while attending the conference, Karzai should have made the international community understand that the people of Afghanistan have his support, and that Karzai should

have explicitly reiterated that he was serious about pursuing the reconciliation with the Taliban. Furthermore, Gailani explained that the international community has its own specific intentions, agendas, and programs. He explained that in 2001, the Bonn Conference was about fighting terrorists; the implementation of a stable government in Afghanistan was secondary on the agenda. He cautioned against the role and influence of the Saudi King to assist in the reconciliation with the Taliban as well as removing various names from the Taliban black list. The Saudi government stipulates that before it offers any assistance in the reconciliation efforts, the Taliban must distance itself away from al-Qaeda. Gailani argued that this demand may not be a feasible expectation, as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda have a long engaged relationship.

Professor Ahmad Saed, stated that the London Conference was not an Afghan conference; it was a “Londoni” conference (Saed 2010). Saed’s concerns echoed Sayed Ishaq Gailani’s statement that a conference on Afghanistan addresses an international agenda and does not project the internal Afghan realities. Furthermore, while Karzai was in Saudi Arabia attempting to gain the support of the kingdom, the Saudi King did not mention the Taliban, nor were any Taliban representatives present. The Saudi government was previously the official patron to the Taliban, and the relationship between Saudi officials and Taliban leadership cannot be dismissed. According to Professor Saed, “the development of a lasting peace requires that the regional powers must have the same strategy, unfortunately, they are competitive, and peace requires cooperation between all of the regional states” (*Ibid.*).

In fact, the U.S., its allies and the Afghan government are caught in a conundrum. Is this group willing to talk to the Taliban, because there is no military victory in sight and no other way to end the war? When the moment comes, will the U.S. and NATO actually talk with the

Taliban, or will they be divided as they are currently? Will President Karzai have the creditability to take part in talks and deliver an agreement? Will the Taliban ideologues, on the verge of victory even agree to the talks and as a consequence, be prepared to disengage from al-Qaeda? Or will they bid their time for the next eighteen months waiting for the Americans to begin to leave?

The Afghan Taliban is a countrywide movement. In the words of the Taliban, their movement is “not a precipitous cyclonic movement, or a movement that makes itself easy prey for the NATO alliance” (Taliban 2010). The present U.S. military strategy is focused on dissuading Taliban commanders and fighters through bribes and resettling them without making serious political concessions or changes to the constitution requires alternative strategies. The Taliban jurisdiction and activities have expanded to the previously quiet west and north of Afghanistan. Their leadership receives protection in Pakistan’s tribal region. Civilian casualties exacerbate this sensitive political environment. Recent attacks in Afghanistan indicate that the Taliban have infiltrated the Afghan army and police — the key institutions that provide law and order in Afghanistan. Development programs have come to a standstill and most of the United Nations staff assigned to Afghanistan has relocated outside of the country due to security concerns.

During a panel discussion on Ariana television, the security situation in Afghanistan, the Afghan Parliamentarian, Sayed Ishaq Gailani challenged the meaning of reconciliation. In the Studio 3 program, Gailani stated, “The people do not know what this term entails, and the parliament does not know the parameters of this term, hence, it is a very weak reconciliation and Taliban kharidari, or the purchasing of Taliban is not peace reconciliation” (Gailani 2010).

Furthermore, he argued that other important issues must be addressed: the house-to-house searches, the detention of civilians, the killing of civilians and the absence of law and order in the country. (*Ibid.*). He warned that until the Taliban is not approached and the international community does not address the issues of civilian casualties seriously, then positive results will not emerge from engaging the Taliban. This sentiment is expressed in the Guardian article titled: “Empty Diplomacy in Afghanistan: Negotiating with the Taliban is too little, too late—western allies need to fix the socio-economic mess started long before (Qaderi 2010). Mustafa Qaderi asserts that the Taliban are the dominant social movement in Afghanistan’s Pashtun regions, and that the support for the Taliban has increased since 2001, “because the U.S. and its allies decided to invade their country... Karzai is a product of the US decision to unilaterally invade Afghanistan” (*Ibid.*). Regarding western perceptions that the Taliban can be destroyed, Professor Saedi explained that the Brown government of Britain considered the Taliban “a war machine that will be destructed” (Saedi 2010). However, this is not a plausible achievement. According to Professor Saedi, Mullah Omar cannot distance himself from al-Qaeda and they have a twenty years old relationship. Furthermore, Al-, Qaeda is present on five continents, and its influences cannot be destroyed overnight.

On the same program Mr. Gailani identified several steps to peace in Afghanistan: the strategic role of the Afghan Parliament, the London Conference, the demands and wishes of Taliban regarding the constitution, foreign role, the Taliban demand that foreign forces must be expelled before reconciliation, and the role of the regional neighbors (Gailani 2010). Gailani explained that regional powers including the Saudi government must be based on cooperation with the government of Afghanistan. He clarified that the stipulation of the Saudi’s that the

Taliban must distance themselves from Al-Qaeda must be readdressed (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, he asserted that Karzai's attempts to include the Taliban in the reconstruction efforts of the country is challenging because the Taliban are not one category. The upper echelons have distinct grievances and expectations than the Taliban rank and file.

Indeed other political experts agree that the Taliban should not be perceived as a single unit. Shukria Barakzai, a member of parliament was a guest on Leedlori, a political program on Ariana television (Barakzai 2010). She categorized the Taliban into six categories. She identified the first category to consist of the unemployed; this group seeks membership due to the economic hardships. The second category is a group without a payam or message. The third category is a money oriented group and in the service of foreign powers. The fourth group of Taliban is heavily involved with the mafia and drugs. The fifth category is the ideological group and gaining prominence since 2001. Barakzai asserts that Ideological category consists of not more than 50 persons. This group is vociferous in their contempt for the central government and do not accept the current political, economic, and legal system. The last category consists of foreign nationals that have joined the Taliban movement and established networks outside of Afghanistan and links the Taliban with international networks.

An additional guest on Leedlori, Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil a former member of the Taliban who has joined the central government asserts that security is of paramount importance in Afghanistan, and until security is established in the country, the Afghans will continue to perceive the government as incompetent and at the mercy of foreign interference (Mutawakil 2010). Establishing security and embarking on peace and reconciliation efforts is a serious topic in Afghanistan. On January 1, 2010, Ariana Pashtu News showed a broadcast of NATO chief,

Ras Musen speaking in defense of the Afghan government's plan to include Taliban in peace and reconciliation plans. Ras Musen asserted that the Taliban do not fight because of religion, many join the movement because of financial tragedies and hardships. He acknowledged that the financial hardships of the people must be addressed. This is an important statement and quite contradictory to the policy of the occupying forces, memory spans are inconsistent in that the current relative ease with which the debate on Afghanistan has shifted from fighting the Taliban to negotiating with them.

### **Cultural Authenticity and Islam**

Afghanistan's Vice-President Khalili has made several speeches in support of tempting the Taliban to join the reconciliation efforts. On January 1, 2010, Khalili, spoke about the importance of reconciliation and asked the international community to assist in this manner. In a public speech broadcast on RTA television, as well as the evening news programs in Kabul, he asserted that the role of the government is to "end the fighting and bring peace" (Khalili 2010). The speech was delivered on a very auspicious day, coinciding with the Ashura, the last day of a forty-day mourning period for Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad. Khalili took the opportunity to evoke memories of a pristine moment in the history of Islam and attempted to link the struggles of modern Afghans with the impeccable character of the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad, and spoke about Imam Hussain's exceptional life style and stated that Afghans must seek to replicate Imam Hussain's life. Khalili asserted that Afghans must receive inspiration from the Imam, live according to the Imam's life and his struggles, stating that, "we must be Ashurai, in our lifestyle and learn from the martyrdom of Imam Hussain" (*Ibid.*). Khalili

also explained that Afghan government has made mistakes in the last eight years and that it is time to rectify the mistakes and cooperate to bring about an end to the conflict in Afghanistan and that reconciliation will ensure peace. However, peace and reconciliation with the Taliban appear very elusive, especially with the recent military campaign in Marjah Helmand and the Taliban call for Jihad is heard throughout Afghanistan. Marjah is one of twelve districts located in Helmand Province.

On February 13, 2010, International forces launched a 15,000 troop offensive on the district. Afghan officials, International personalities claimed on the Afghan media that the campaign is a joint military effort to stabilize Helmand Province. On February 13, 2010, Voice of America news, Ariana news, and RTA broadcast the speeches of the Afghan Ministry of Defense, and the NATO spokesperson, asserting that the campaign receives logistics support from both International security forces and the Afghan army. However, Operation Mushtarak (cooperation) as it was strategically called, was clearly led by U.S. and European forces and that Afghan security forces have a superficial role. The biggest operation in nine years, the objective of the invasion of Marja is to dispel the Taliban from Marjah, expand government, create a safe political environment that would establish security, which would lead to long term stability. While this is official government rhetoric, the local population in Marja has faced challenges for weeks previous to the invasion. On February 13, 2010, Ariana News reported that 500 families had fled Marjah before the operation. On February 14, 2010, Al-Jazeera news reported that 12 civilians were killed. The ISAF released a statement to the Afghan media that two rockets missed their target. The ISAF expressed regret at the loss of life, and extended apologies to Karzai (ISAF 2010). The International security forces and the Afghan government may claim that

Operation Mushtarak is waged for the sole purpose of bringing peace and security to Helmand Province. However, the residents of Helmand lament over the loss of life and property, and challenge the necessity of 15,000 troops and sophisticated weapons. They claim that the main purpose of the invasion of Marjah is to terrorize the local population. Furthermore, they question the plausibility of 15,000 troop incursion into a district that was previously home to 100-200 Taliban.

On February 15, 2010, Al-Jazeera news interviewed Abdul Salam Zaef, the former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan. Mullah Zaef is currently living in Kabul, and has made appearances on Al-Jazeera on several occasions. He questioned the military operation, and warned that civilians will become targets and casualties. He explained that the people of Afghanistan are against the occupation, and they are exhausted by the years of war and violence (Zaef 2010). He recommended that the operation should be stopped and the Afghan people respected. Furthermore he questioned the strategy of bringing about reconciliation by killing the Afghan people. He called objectives of Operation Mushtarak a “dream, not a reality, and warned that the country and the people could be controlled through such methods” (*Ibid.*).

It is incorrect to assume that when the Taliban call on their fellow Muslims to join them in the Jihad against the “infidel” occupiers of Afghanistan and their Afghan collaborators, they have invented a new tradition. The Taliban did not “invent” the call for Jihad as a new ideology in Afghanistan. On the contrary, the Taliban leadership is engaged in a concerted effort to manipulate the existing meaning of various words and symbols that hold importance in the psyche of the Afghan people. As Alexander Motyl (2001: 59) observed: “The point is that both invention and imagination presuppose preexisting building blocks on the one hand and their

combination and subsequent transformation by inventors or imaginers into a novel end-product on the other. We cannot invent or imagine *ex nihilo*. Such an act should be called *creation*. Nor do we invent or imagine already existing things. Here, *remembrance* might be the more appropriate term. Nor, finally, can invention or imagination occur without conscious inventors and imaginers” (Emphasis in original). Thus, this strategic use of symbols by political leaders exploit the emotional association of the people and they are mobilized once they hear the impassioned speeches and rhetoric, calling on them to emerge from their state of inertia and join the struggle for liberation is not new. Nor is this strategy restricted to politics in Afghanistan.

The Taliban argue that the alternative is cooption, which will lead to annihilation of the people, Islam and their lands and their authentic Afghan traditions. Hobsbawm (2007) may even argue that assertions regarding the authenticity of traditions may even be deceptive and misleading. For example, the Taliban claim they are the legitimate guardians of Islam and the protectors of the people. However, to many Afghans the Taliban blatant disregard for their well being and respect for life and property is a serious matter. Afghan news channels broadcast the statements of Afghans that the Taliban should not mingle with them because then U.S. and NATO military forces target their villages and they suffer the consequences of the foreign forces military campaigns. The Afghans explain that they are caught between the bullets and bombs of the occupying forces, and the suicide bombs of the Taliban. In similar vain, the Afghans demand to know why the Taliban prescribe such rigid rules in places where they hold authority.

Afghans question the “authenticity” and the Islamic nature of the laws the Taliban term as Shariat. The Taliban expend great energies and argue that the Karzai regime is illegitimate and an appendage of the Western interests and goals in Afghanistan. The Taliban list of grievances

include the following: corruption of government officials, the opening of brothels in Kabul, the open mixing of the sexes, the change in dress (both men and women), and the increase in poppy production. The Taliban released a comprehensive statement on May 5, 2010. The statement titled “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan: Victories of the Mujahideen in the words of the enemy” (Taliban 2010). The statement addresses the foreign forces and reminds them that the reason for the failure of the foreign forces is that “you have imposed a corrupt administration on the people of Afghanistan; you have invaded the country, Afghanistan and deprived the people of their independence and national sovereignty. You have put thousands of innocent Afghans behind the bars in Guantanamo, Bagram, Pulli-Charkhi, Kandahar and other open and secret jails. You have turned Afghanistan into the cobweb of CIA network; you carry out night raids on people’s houses and martyr defenseless Afghans, and you bombard wedding and funeral ceremonies. Your grip on the country will keep reducing unless and until you put an end to your aggression and stop torturing and martyring the miserable Afghans, and leave” (*Ibid.*).

In this scenario the Taliban and the Karzai government are in a battle to establish their legitimacy, each group asserting its authority and claiming that they are the appropriate party to safeguard Islam and the Afghan national identity. It is important to reiterate that nationalism is described as “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991) and “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). Ethnic identities are built on the assumption that group members share ancestors. Nationalism takes this notion further; it claims that ethnic boundaries need to coincide with political boundaries. Therefore, the only legitimate leaders are those who are from “our” people and who defend “our” national community. This means that leaders must convince the public of their cultural authenticity and moral authority to lead in the name of the nation. Many classic

works — including Bentham (1988), Downs (1957) and Machiavelli — have highlighted the fact that rulers and ruling elites are driven to stay in power. Thus, they may claim to be champions of the ordinary folk all the while, they are promoting their own interests. Thus, ruling elites seek to garner public support by appealing to popular notions and ideas.

Similarly, the opposition also appeals to the sentiments of the population. For example, the most recent Taliban attack in Kabul was covered in the Afghan media. The Afghans were wondering why the Taliban would abuse a vulnerable and war devastated population. Taliban forces have become increasingly more aggressive. They are strategically drawing foreign military forces and the Afghan forces into battle and the leadership is vociferous in its attempts to claim victory. The Taliban appeared to relish and make public the U.S. General's debacle during the summer of 2010. "The Jihad by Afghans and the new military strategies of Mujahideen have made the Generals in Pentagon to lose their wits" (Taliban 2010). Interestingly, and much to the dismay and chagrin of the United States, the title of the statement of the previous excerpt is, "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan: General Petraeus' dizziness in the congress reflects the U.S. Defeat in Afghanistan" (*Ibid.*).

The Taliban have taken the opportunity to highlight that Afghanistan is not in the control of the foreign forces, and that the government in Kabul does not have authority. The Taliban are able to exert their authority and control major highways between Jalalabad and Kabul, and Kabul and Qandahar. According to the Taliban, "The Mujahideen of the Islamic Emirate have a tangible presence in 80% of the country" (Taliban 2010). It is general knowledge that the Taliban have set up checkpoints, and stop cars en route to various destinations and question passengers. This is a blatant disregard for the authority of the current administration, and a legitimate government

does not permit an insurgent group to administer a major highway. If the Karzai administration wants to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the population, it must seek to secure the strategic transit routes, and secure the security of the people, as they are vulnerable and hundreds flee the southern cities on a daily basis due to fear of insecurity. The Taliban resistance is at its core a nationalist resistance to external forces and their Afghan allies, or perceived allies.

Political Islam is a complex phenomenon specific to diverse regions and peoples of the world. For example, Nazi Ayubi (1991) contends that contemporary political Islam should not be considered a “return” to the “golden age” in the history of Islam. Ayubi also argues that the role of religion in Muslim states is not historically valid. He wants to dispel the orientalist/fundamentalist myth that Islam is by its nature a political religion (*Ibid.*, 3). He presents arguments from Islamic history to explain that the “political nature” of Islam as a theoretical construct is not historically valid. He examines the breach between the utopian reconstruction of the past and existing historical reality.

Regarding the political interpretation of the Islam of the Taliban movement, political Islam should be understood as a modern movement responding to matters relating to the contemporary realities of the Afghan state. Eden Naby (1988: 787) articulates that the utilization of religious expressions and symbols in times of crisis is an ancient method and spans vast geographic regions, cultures and peoples. In order to achieve some semblance of legitimacy, the Taliban leadership references an idealized Islamic political theory and promises to create a political order constituent with the fundamentals of Islam. In this sense, the Taliban did not invent a new ideology; they are manipulating the meaning of strategic words and symbols that hold significance in the psyche of the Afghans. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (2007)

assert that political elites “invent traditions”, and that the invention of so-called authentic traditions has significant social and political functions in society. Ayubi (1991: 34) appropriately states: “It is one of the ironies of utopia that nostalgia can be evoked for things that have never really existed.” The Taliban resurrect an ideal past from Islamic history is very distinct because the “golden age” of Islam is a reference to the faith’s early years under the authority of the Prophet Mohammad and the subsequent four caliphs. The nostalgia for the past does not take into consideration that the first and most ideal of the Muslim communities as well as rulers of that community were Arab and identified with a specific region of the world. The glories of the early Muslims were not the glories of the Pashtun Afghans. Subsequent Islamic empires — the Ottomans and the Mughals — were not Arab. One was Turkish and the other Central Asian and hence “Turkic” (as distinct from Turkish). Furthermore, the Safavid Empire was Persian and Shiite. Regardless, the Taliban movement is an example of the response to alienation from the state structures and a search for authenticity. Ayubi (1991: 226) argues that the Islamists are “on a collision course with the state, whose political authoritarianism and economic failures are taken...to be symptoms of a deeper sin, which is betrayal of God.” The Taliban are a modern political phenomenon; this is not a revival of an ancient Islam. In fact, the political utilization of Islam is a part of a recurring pattern of ethnic and nationalist mythmaking in Afghan history whereby key elites attempt to galvanize popular support to displace one regime by chastising it as an agent of colonial or neo-colonial rule.

Political commentators in Afghanistan are present on a daily basis on television news and political programs and they speak vehemently against the misuse and abuse of public funds for private gains. On Monday 14, December 2009, a conference on corruption was held in Kabul.

Both Ariana channel and Afghanistan's public television (RTA) broadcast the conference. President Karzai, cabinet ministers, members of parliament, Afghan governors, international aid organizations, NATO representatives, and members of the Afghan civil society attended the meeting. Mr. Karzai addressed the gathering both in Pashtu and Dari for half an hour, and spoke about corruption (or facade idari) as a characteristic of Afghan daily public life. Corruption is so rampant he remarked that it is not only powerful people in Afghanistan who abuse their political position. The government of Afghanistan is synonymous with corruption. Even Karzai agrees that corruption has permeated every aspect of the government machinery and unfortunately, it is not a recent phenomenon. He addressed this issue on July 3, 2007 at the Conference on the Rule of Law. He stated, "Corruption, fueled by a host of factors including inadequate remuneration and procedural complexities, is rampant. We do not have enough professional judges and legal workers to run the system and those that we have are vastly lacking in appropriate training and experience" (Karzai 2007). In the same speech, he explained that Afghanistan had a "long and arduous road to travel before we can make the vision of justice a reality for the Afghan people" (*Ibid.*). He stated that the people of Afghanistan "want security; security of their lives, their honour and their property. They want to be able to buy, enjoy, and invest in property without being threatened...(*Ibid.*). Karzai also voiced concern regarding "kidnapping, robbery, murder, and land-grabbing on a daily basis" (*Ibid.*).

The Afghan justice system is also in shambles. Studying Afghan perceptions of the rule of law, the World Bank found that Afghanistan's justice system is at the bottom 5 percent in the world by 2006, the exact same ranking as in 2000, the last full year of the Taliban government. The last few years of reconstruction have failed to ameliorate matters and Afghanistan's justice

system is the least effective in terms of transparency and accountability. A corrupt judicial system undermines governance and popular support for Karzai's government, and cripples the judicial and institutional mechanisms necessary to prosecute criminals. Ordinary Afghans are aware of these problems, as many claim that they are involved with bribery with police officers, court officials, and when applying for work, or university. Afghans perceive the Karzai government's neglect to combat corruption. On December 3, 2009, Kathy Gannon from the Associated Press conducted an interview with Hamid Karzai. The full transcript of the interview was posted to the Government of Afghanistan's website. Gannon addressed a set of challenging questions to Karzai, and the nature of the questions pertained to the president's administration. An important question pertained to the unwavering prominence of the Taliban and the disillusionment of the Afghans with their government. Karzai responded that perhaps the renewed United States strategy in conjunction with assistance from NATO would succeed. Regarding the disillusionment of the people, Karzai responded that success is not possible, "unless we provide protection to the Afghan people, second, to convince them that we will provide them with protection... to convince the Afghan people that what we are doing is exactly needed to the direction of the defeat of terrorism and what is important for that is to reach to their cooperation" (Karzai 2009).

The lack of security has wider implications, because it generates support for the Taliban. The Taliban in turn capitalize on the incompetence of the central government. They are likely to profit from particular sentiments that resonate within the population, for example, the idea of the corrupt states and ideas of Islamic social justice appeal to the people. Concepts of social justice are prevalent in Islam, and as the Taliban claim that they are guardians of the religion and

people, they freely exploit this idea in an effort to alert Afghans that the central government is ineffective. Karzai is fully cognizant that the Taliban are attracting the population to their side. In the 2009 interview with the Associated Press, Karzai conceded that he considered it necessary to participate in a dialogue with the Taliban. He stated “this struggle against terrorism and extremism can not be won by war alone, by fighting alone, and we must be very clear, in our minds and particularly, important here is the mind of the international community and the United States that all the Taliban are not terrorists and extremists, those who are with Al Qaeda and other terrorist outfits are not welcome” (Karzai 2009). However, he continued to explain that thousands of Taliban are “frightened, whose homes were searched, who were intimidated who have run away from fear or whatever other reason” (*Ibid.*). Karzai stressed the importance of returning the Taliban to their homes and providing them with protection. Furthermore, once the Taliban are returned to their homes, “we must make sure they are protected and that their homes are not raided by the Afghan government or by the intentional forces, that is the way to success” (*Ibid.*).

Afghan villagers also report that neither the Afghan security forces, nor NATO protects villages and districts from the Taliban. This forces the people to support the Taliban, even if they do not like them. When the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in 2001, Afghanistan had suffered two decades of war and violence. The political conflict had fragmented the social fabric of the society, devastated millions of people, and undermined the intricate system of networks and loyalties. Afghanistan was an underdeveloped country, and its levels of basic services and social indicators were at the bottom of the world. For example, Afghanistan’s health indicators were among the lowest in the world. Interestingly, Afghanistan’s underdevelopment was not the

reason for the escalating violence and success of the Taliban. The period after the dismantling of the Taliban regime was calm, and Afghans were expecting positive change. However, the lives of the ordinary Afghans did not improve, and the continuation of the Taliban mobilization was the inability of the central government to improve life in rural areas of the country.

Long-term damage has occurred as a result of the central government's incompetence to provide basic services and protect the local population, especially in rural areas. On March 4, 2010, Ariana Dari News broadcast the United Nations Special Envoy to Afghanistan, Kai Eide asserted that the international community's excessive reliance upon the use of military strategy instead of looking to a political and comprehensive solution must be revised (Eide 2010). The United States and its allies myopically focus on military strategies exclusively and neglect efforts on building a strong foundation for the Afghan state. They neglected to persuade the Pashtun tribes, sub-tribes, clans, and other local institutions in the south and eastern regions of the country and persuade them to support the central government.

The largest increases in Taliban support are among rural people, women, and in Pakistan border regions. Local villagers have received the brunt of the military campaigns, killing large numbers of livestock, killing civilians, and destroying numerous vineyards causing damage to life and property and generating resentment toward U.S. and NATO troops.

There is much speculation on the ideological orientation of the Taliban. The assertion that the Taliban leadership's ideological vision remains dedicated to impose in Afghanistan a radical interpretation of Sunni Islam is incorrect. One does not hear of the commanders' dedication to the principles of the religion, rather, Islam is used as a strategic tool to discredit the Afghan regime, which they and many others in the country see as a puppet regime, and to overthrow the

regime, and coerce the foreign forces to withdraw. While many in Afghanistan perceive the central government as illegitimate, they also complain that the Taliban do not observe morality and the rules of war. Afghans argue that the Taliban do not care for the people and will sacrifice them for their own political agenda. The villagers claim that the Taliban intimidate them by distributing shabnamah, or night letters, leaflets that warn villagers not to cooperate with foreign forces or the Karzai regime. The distribution of the shabnamah were prevalent in the days leading to the presidential elections, where the Taliban spokesperson stated on several occasions that the Taliban were giving fair warning to the people, they were directed not to participate in the elections, and anyone who did not follow this directive would receive the appropriate punishment. In addition, they conducted target assassinations, and burned reconstruction and development projects.

Since 2001, the Taliban organization has evolved into two significant levels. The top levels include the leadership structure and key commanders. They were motivated by a political version of Islam and saw the insurgency as a fight between Islam on one side and Western and hence non-Muslims as well as the West's surrogate in Kabul on the other side. While an exact estimate of the Taliban does not exist, a figure roughly estimating 10,000 local fighters is unofficially acknowledged. This figure comprises of men from rural villages paid to set up roadside bombs, launch rockets and mortars at NATO and Afghan forces. Such individuals are likely to join the Taliban for a few weeks or months. The Taliban also organized a shadow government, which included governors for Afghan provinces and even appointed cabinet level ministers for key posts such as defense and justice. For example, the Taliban regularly releases asserting that they are waging a jihad against not only for the independence of Afghanistan, but

they are fighting for all Muslims everywhere. They claim that Mullah Mohammad Omar is representing an extended umma, and a large nation is behind him. Mohammad Omar's famous November, 2009 statement encourages all Muslims to pray for the success of the Mujahideen—"the protectors of Islam and Islamic ummah — and extend them moral and Islamic support and should defend their cause as a legitimate Islamic cause" (Taliban 2009). He continues that the Americans and its allies have interfered excessively to "destabilize the Islamic world and provoke differences in the Islamic countries" (*Ibid.*). He cautions that the Muslim umma should be on guard against the onslaught of "enemies" (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, the Taliban are disseminating their message with the assistance of young Pakistani trained mullahs to bring attention to their cause in mosques in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Since the 1990s, the Taliban have accepted modern technology. During the 1990s, they discouraged the use of the Internet and television by closing down internet cafes and banning television. After 2001, they use As-Sahab, media network to disseminate their ideas and to recruit supporters. This website releases videos of important Taliban leaders, making use of modern technology to disseminate their message and explain the Taliban ideology. Another technological advance was the adoption of suicide bombing tactics against Afghan and international forces. During the 1990s, the suicide-bombing tactic was absent, presumably because the Quran prohibits suicide. This is an interesting "reinvention" of traditions. The Quran did not change; what changed are the Taliban's political ambitions and strategies. The Taliban are divided over the strategy of the suicide bombing technique. For several members of the leadership, especially Mullah Omar collateral damage — especially when Afghan women and children were killed as a result of a suicide attack was unjustifiable.

The Taliban use religion as a strategic tool in two respects. The Taliban regularly use arguments that “Western countries are trying to destroy Islam” in their conversations with the population as well as their night letters or Shabnama). The Taliban claim that the U.S. has plans to target Islam and eradicate it from the region. How is it possible to eradicate a religion that has lived for centuries? However, it is this fear is what aids in assisting in the recruitment of the suicide bombers. The government attempts to challenge the Taliban propaganda by launching its own offensive. For example, this summer, before the presidential campaigns began, the government had strategically organized a conference of the important religious groups in Afghanistan. ulama Council of Afghanistan called on the Taliban to abandon violence and support the Afghan government in the name of Islam. A number of Afghan Muslim clerics publicly supported the Afghan government and called the Taliban activities un-Islamic. In addition, the ulama Council and some Afghan ulama issued *fatwas* that opposed suicide bombing. They argued that suicide bombing did not lead to an eternal life in paradise and that suicide is not permitted in Islam.

## **Conclusion**

The conflict in Afghanistan is fueled by the existing political, social and economic realities in Afghanistan. This chapter was informed by the extensive number of Taliban statements and Hamid karzai’s interviews and public announcements. The research started with central objective of developing the hypothesis that the current conflict in Afghanistan is not about Islam, rather the conflict’s perpetuation is closely linked to foreign occupation, years of war and violence, and the central government’s neglect to implement necessary socio-economic

policies with the intent to improve the lives of the population it represents. The perpetuation of political unrest and the systematic destruction of life and property of Afghans by one successive regime after another, combined with the realities of the occupation of Afghanistan by two of the world's powerful super power states has been detrimental to the psyche of the Afghans. The indignity of strategic political, social and economic circumstances has led the Afghans to feeling alienated, frustrated and instilling in them a feeling of utter powerlessness. In Afghanistan a contest of power exists between the central government buttressed by a foreign military force and the Taliban. The outcome depends upon the strategic use of political rhetoric strategic actions that may alleviate the misery of the local population. The Taliban contend that the war ravaged population of Afghanistan is beleaguered by the incompetent central government that cannot feed the population, provide security, or protect the civilians of Afghanistan from the onslaught of the foreign military forces. The Taliban propose that they are the guardians of the state, society and religion of the war wary population. Hence, the Taliban appropriates religious symbols, discourse and terminology to express the frustrations of the grieving Afghans. The Taliban assert that they will release Afghans and Afghanistan from the grips of the foreign powers and implement a just and more distributive political, economic and justice system. Karzai's regime does not leave such promises of the Taliban uncontested. The president and his officials are engaged in a battle to make itself relevant to the population of the Afghanistan. The president and his allies present themselves as "authentic" Afghans tasked with the responsibility of safeguarding the Afghans. However, both the Taliban and Karzai along with his foreign supporters must provide sufficient evidence to the Afghans that their efforts are indeed genuine. The ordinary Afghan is caught between the violence and political manipulations of the Taliban

as well as the patrons of the central government. Hence, the Taliban are using Afghan grievances and successfully tapping into sentiments of Afghan nationalism and exploiting the policy failures of Kabul. The result is a weakening public support for the central government. Furthermore, the continuation of the foreign occupation and all that it entails is tolerated less. The movement against the United States military is a strong indication that increasingly Afghans see the United States as a problem than a solution. The United States military actions in Afghanistan was at one point considered a “bitter medicine”, but it is only so much that ordinary Afghans can take. The Afghans may accept the indignity of the occupation for a period, and their resistance to the military campaigns of foreign powers is inevitable.

In addition, the Afghan, or Pashtun, nationalist narrative plays on the strong sense of resistance developed upon the collective myth of fighting and expelling foreign forces since the time of Alexander the Great. The current international forces military operations in Helmand Province has revived images of the Anglo-Afghan wars, from the British massacre of Afghans in 1842 to the legend of Malalai, the Afghan heroine, raising the Afghan flag at the battle of Maiwand and calling on the Afghan ghazian fighters to expel the invaders. In addition there is the internationalist jihadi narrative, which compels Muslims to resist foreign occupation in the land of the Muslims, evoking the idea of a unified Muslim umma and transcending borders.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This work started out with a central mission — to expound the hypothesis that the current conflict in Afghanistan is not about “Islam,” rather it is about foreign occupation, continued years of war and violence, and a lack of genuine effort to implement necessary socio-economic and political reforms. Thirty years of war, violence and systematic destruction of life and property of Afghans by successive regimes has negatively impacted the population, leading them to feeling alienated, frustrated and instilling in them a general sense of powerlessness. The majority of research, particularly since 2001, conducted on political Islam focuses on its ideology and operational strategy on the international level. Indeed, this reality contravenes the actual role that Islam plays in society. In the case of Afghanistan, the Taliban movement’s primary target remains the country’s domestic regime and the contest for power and its appropriation is waged accordingly. This work claims that the success of the Taliban movement, as well as the success of previous Islamist agendas, is firmly rooted in the Islamists appropriation of religious symbols, discourse and terminology to express the frustrations of a grieving population. Popular discontent is the result of economic disenfranchisement, the compromise of the status of various groups as well as their loss of political power. The demise of one elite’s power base introduced the emergence of another elite. In 2001, when the United States and its coalition forces invaded Afghanistan, the Taliban were officially dismissed from the political scene in Afghanistan. Thousands of Taliban were executed, and imprisoned, others, including members of the leadership retreated and reorganized. The United States vowed to exterminate the Taliban, and continuing the war with the Taliban required a proxy in Afghanistan. Within a

short span of time the political vacuum in Kabul and elsewhere in the country was occupied by a newly emerging elite of warlords only too willing to play the role of the proxy in the “war against terror.” The United States found an amiable partner in the Northern Alliance; many of their commanders were Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazaras and historically not associated with the social, economic, and political elite power dichotomy in Pashtun Afghanistan. The commanders were remnants of the jihad against the Soviet Union, and notoriously infamous for committing grave atrocities against the civilian population. After the collapse of the Communist regime in Kabul, these warlords ruled the country from 1992-1996. Their abuses ravaged the Afghan populace — a people fatigued from decades of political chaos. This helped to lay the groundwork for the emergence of the Taliban. The Northern Alliance was elevated to leadership position in Afghanistan at the behest of a foreign invading army without consideration for the wishes of the Afghan people. This evolution of political events was further exacerbated by the United States and its allies decision to introduce another obscure figure — Hamid Karzai — to Afghan politics. The United States and its allies thought that the decision to appoint Karzai as president of an interim administration would be considered palatable to Afghans. Yet, Karzai was a poor choice to serve as a unifying force; he did not win through legitimate channels the right to become a national symbol of reconciliation. For many Afghans, particularly for the Pashtun Afghans, that right belonged to the former king of Afghanistan, Mohammad Zahir Shah, who had also returned to Afghanistan from Rome after thirty years of exile. After the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, with the memories of the crimes of warlords still fresh, Afghan civilians braced themselves for a resumption of the violence that marked the years 1992 to 1996. The north of Afghanistan was plagued by revenge attacks by U.S.-backed warlords on the Pashtun populations, regardless of

the fact that not all Pashtuns supported the Taliban. In the months following the U.S. invasion, Northern Alliance forces carried out large-scale violence against people, and these atrocities forced thousands of Afghans to flee northern Afghanistan.

In backing the Northern Alliance militarily and supporting their role in the Bonn Conference, the United States gave the Northern Alliance free reign to settle in as Afghanistan's *de facto* government. This arrangement provided a lucrative opportunity to the Northern Alliance to monopolize power in Afghanistan at a time when they previously controlled less than eight percent of the country. A regime which appealed only to a small segment of society was presented to the world as the representation of all of Afghanistan's national aspirations. The United States also extended its political sphere of influence as a military and economic power. American intervention in Afghanistan has allowed it to acquire a strategic foothold in Central Asia, where its nemesis, Russia had historically claimed supremacy. Consequently, the United States and its allies have invested exorbitant funds, and human resources in the country, with the intention to stay in the region on a long term basis. While the occupation of Afghanistan has become extremely problematic in terms of financing, moral, and international political prestige, the U.S. intends to stay in the region. Inevitably, the foreign presence in Afghanistan and an incompetent government in Afghanistan serve as an insurmountable obstacle in building a set of necessary and viable political institutions. In the absence of self-determination for the Afghans, and the absence of institutions, the sovereignty of Afghanistan is in shambles and the Afghans are far from being masters of their own destiny.

The Afghans have a response to foreign occupation. The struggle for independence is waged in Universities and in civil society. However, the strongest resistance is waged by the

formerly ousted Taliban. The Taliban elite utilize these factors and transform them to become powerful instruments of internal political change. In the West, we hear frequently of religious zealots pining for a bygone era and obsessed with launching a crusade to convert the non-Muslim population of the world to Islam. Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis alarmingly rave that a “clash of civilizations” is inevitable between the modern, secular, and technologically advanced West and the backward East. The West, they asserted, developed notions of human rights, and developed sophisticated institutions and systems to guarantee values and advance individual liberty. Alas, the populations of the East are still living in the dark ages. There are glaring inconsistencies in the arguments proposed by the abovementioned self-appointed experts on Islam and Muslims. Certainly, Islam is the backbone of Muslim societies; yet, the foundations of these societies and the bricks and mortar that has constructed them, is comprised of many components that have evolved over the course of centuries of political, social and economic alliances and battles. Huntington and Lewis present Islam as an “organic” religious and political system, where religious and political systems are not differentiated but function in a single structure. In this paradigm, Islam is both a state and a religion. Hence, every aspect of Muslim societies as well as explanations describing progress of diverse set of societies is reduced to the religion itself. This type of religious determinism neglects vast regional, political, economic and cultural diversity that exist among Muslim societies. Furthermore, in this context, Western values and concepts of power are prioritized and perceived superior to the values and concepts of Muslim societies. Perhaps their greatest disservice to scholarship is that they treat billions of people and their political societies as units — East and West. This form of reductionism disregards the evolution of political and geographic boundaries, and the juxtaposition of inferior

“East” and a superior West leads to fear mongering that lead to detrimental policy making. In contrast to Lewis and Huntington, other scholars acknowledge and appreciate the great diversity and complexity of Islamic societies. They argue that political Islam is not inherently opposed to modernity. Smith (2004), Ayubi (1991), and Roy (1990, 1994) claim that Islamist organizations should be viewed, primarily, as modern social movements whose successes are rooted in their ability to mobilize the population towards a concrete goal. The association of the people to Islamist movements is not solely defined by religion and Islamic law, but rather it is an alliance based on the combination of grievances of the people. In this context Islam serves as an ideology, a vehicle of protest.

In Afghanistan, there is an absence of alternative institutional and ideological venues of opposition. Therefore, Islamism provides the space for articulating popular dissatisfaction. The popular dissatisfaction is a set of real life grievances, social, economic and most importantly, political. The current battle is not about Islam, “Islam” is a tool utilized by the elites to forge a new Afghan identity — an identity that benefits these ethnic entrepreneurs. For example, a content analysis of the political speeches of the Taliban leadership as well as the Karzai administration establish that the battle in Afghanistan is not waged for Islam, rather, a group of strategic political actors are using Islam to promote their political causes. Furthermore, this contemporary view of Islam as a means for political protest is not new. Since the birth of Islam, the religion has been utilized both by leaders to legitimize their rule, and by revolutionaries to denounce it. Islam resonates in the psyche of the Afghans and the themes of social justice, equality, and challenging oppressive regimes. The Taliban movement should be viewed as a modern movement, and its success attributed to its ability to mobilize the population towards the

objective of releasing Afghanistan from the yoke of an illegitimate and irresponsible regime supported by a foreign occupation. Indeed, the Taliban discourse is articulated in religious and moral framework, nevertheless the widespread support they receive is linked to the social, economic, and political realities of Afghanistan. Similarly, the individuals who support the Taliban do so not necessarily for religious reasons, but because they demand a restructuring of the existing paradigm. The population is deeply disenchanted with the Karzai regime and the brutalities of the foreign occupation. The Taliban's message of Islamic social justice for many provides a realistic alternative to the injustices of the existing order.

Arguably, Islam provides an important and strategic point of reference in Afghan society. During the last three decades, Afghans have suffered through decades of war, and the perpetual conflict has led to the death and maiming of millions, forces millions into a massive exodus, internally displaced millions. The destruction was systematic and fragmented the very fabric of society that had evolved over centuries. Hence, this physical and most important psychological uprooting of the population led to an identity crisis and the inability to cope with the unknown. Afghans experienced and continue to experience a tremendous sense of alienation and a loss of identity. It is not surprising that the Afghans would turn to Islam for comfort. In the sea of alienation, and destruction, Islam offers a sense of identity, brotherhood, and set of values that provides protection against the onslaught of night raids on civilian homes, extrajudicial killings, and bombardment of villages. Islam provides a sanctuary for the psychologically maimed population, a source of justice and means of recourse for the exhausted population. This close affinity with Islam is certainly not a recent phenomenon. Afghanistan's diverse population is fused together by one important common denominator, a shared faith. The kings of Afghanistan

borrowed political legitimacy from Islam to congeal the diverse regions and the heterogeneous people of Afghanistan. In this sense, Islam played a strategic role in the organization and bureaucratization of the internal political development of the country. In addition, the religion has held a central role among all resistance movements. For example, during the Nineteenth century, and the early part of the twentieth century, the Afghan ruling elite as well as the ulama relied upon Islam as an effective ideological weapon to mobilize the population against British imperial intrusions into Afghanistan.

Islam is a strategic point of reference in Afghanistan. A second component Pashtunwali — older than Islam, structured the ideological framework upon which the Afghan state was formed from 1747 to the middle of the nineteenth century. Pashtunwali is an egalitarian tribal model and adhering to it characterizes what it means to be an “authentic” Pashtun. Pashtunwali serves both as an ideology and a system of common law; it has evolved its own sanctions and institutions. The unifying force in this reality is Islam. Ninety-nine percent of Afghans acknowledge Islam as their religion. Yet, in the course of Afghan history, social organization, ethnic and linguistic ties, and regional and economic interests transcend the importance of religious affinity. While kinship ties were reinforced, particularly during moments of national crises, Islam enjoyed the enviable position around which the diverse Afghans could converge. This cohesion was essentially a form of manipulation by the ruling elites, regardless of their own personal relationship with their faith. In all likelihood they lived out their lives as genuine Muslims; however, in order to achieve political gains, elites emphasized Islamic principles — the common denominator that would be acceptable to all Afghans. After all, Islam provides a system of norms, a code regulating human relations, or social morality. Indeed, to the individual,

Islam offers an array of spiritual dimensions. This spiritual dimension is projected in human behavior and observable in society. The individual is integrally linked to the umma (community of believers). Membership in the umma extends beyond the boundaries of political, legal, and social parameters. This comprehensive interpretation of Islam is in contravention to the public policy analysts in the West, along with some scholars who attempt to portray the Taliban as an exclusively Islamic movement obsessed with bringing about a “new order” based on the application of Shariat. Such assertions regarding complex world politics, accept Bernard Lewis’s distorted perspectives on Islam or Samuel Huntington’s ethno-centric arguments in *Clash of Civilization*.

The arguments presented in previous chapters is that the Taliban resistance is at its core a nationalist resistance to external (foreign) forces and their Afghan (domestic) allies, or perceived allies. Political Islam is a complex phenomenon specific to diverse regions and peoples of the world. This phenomenon is part of a recurring pattern of ethnic and nationalist mythmaking in Afghan history whereby key elites expend great effort to galvanize popular support to displace one regime by chastising it as an agent of colonial or neo-colonial rule. Therefore, Islamist movements are not narrow and specific programmatic units with clearly identifiable beginning and ending points. On the contrary, Islamist movements are much broader in scope and disenfranchised and disillusioned Muslims join such movements in search of justice and authenticity.

Afghans have a historical, cultural and emotional attachment to Islam. This need to use religious symbols and religious references become most obvious during periods of national crises. In the course of the political development of modern Afghanistan, the Afghan kingdom

was beset by internal and external calamities, and elites determined to bring about order and stability. Regarding elite behavior, Ranger (2007: 249) explains that elite efforts are a result of “conscious determination to re-establish order and security and a sense of community by means of defining and reinforcing tradition.” Elites designate themselves as guardians of society, and this self-anointing strategy distinguishes “us” from “them.” Islam is a legitimate tool to reinforce a sense of community and bring about desirable change. In previous chapters, we learned that the need to build solidarity with the community satisfies the individual’s deep seated emotional needs (Barreto 2009). We are not compelled to join just any movement; we join in the collective struggle of a group that offers us a sense of identity, unity, and values, a group that placates our psychological concerns. Political elites understand this phenomenon very well and in the case of the Taliban, they provide a vision of a just society using symbols of the glorious Islamic past. The reference to the Islamic past merits an explanation. Islam can be used as a solidifying factor in an anti-colonial struggle and a major contributor in the development of an identity. The Anglo-Afghan Wars of the nineteenth century, the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and the present resistance to the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan are examples of this solidifying factor.

During particular intervals, and with the blessings of the ruling power, the Afghan ulama have enjoyed considerable political, religious and social power in Afghanistan. These clerics held considerable power during movements of political upheaval, especially during national crises when the country was beset by the problems of foreign intervention. The power of the ulama extended over not only the decisions and actions of the population, but influenced the population’s interpretation and understanding of domestic and international events. At other

times, the power of the clerics was kept in check by the state. The most precise example of when an Afghan ruler exerted control was at the conclusion of the Second Anglo Afghan War. Amir Abdur Rahman Khan severely curtailed the power of the ulama — either executing the mullahs, or imprisoning them. They had participated wholeheartedly in the jihad against the British, but once Afghanistan became independent, the “Iron Amir” made certain power belonged to the Afghan sovereign. The Amir’s policy was not an attempt to weaken the position of Islam in Afghanistan, but rather a strategic move to reinforce the status of Islam in Afghan society and politics and to incorporate religion into the state apparatus.

For the Afghan political and religious elite, Islam is a shield that cloaks their person as well as ideas in legitimacy so that they may appeal to the masses and win favor for particular policies they wish to implement. It is important to note that Islam does not exist, exclusively, within the purview of the elites. For the Afghan masses, Islam and in particular the political use of Islam holds great appeal. In this social and political milieu, in its most fundamental sense, political Islam should be understood as an ideology of protest. Thus, political Islam becomes a beacon around which the groups most adversely affected by the existing order converge, whether it is the abuse of power of the existing leadership or a foreign occupation to which they are responding. Political Islam provides the masses with the framework to converge in their criticism of the *status quo*. This deliberate use of religion as a political tool to consolidate power at the center and unify the population is not exclusively an Afghan political phenomenon. It is a widespread practice spanning diverse geographic boundaries, political and social systems of diverse peoples as well as historical epochs.

The history of modern Afghanistan is riddled with foreign intervention and imperial intrigue. Foreign interference in Afghanistan was not left unchecked. Afghans waged a jihad within the context of Islam and national sovereignty whenever the country's territories were invaded. Jihad was waged not only to protect the physical terrain and the national boundaries of the country, but the religion of the people as well. Afghan monarchs frequently called their subjects to jihad against foreign adversaries. The two Anglo-Afghan wars are examples presented in previous chapters. During the latter part of the twentieth century, Jihad served the purpose of galvanizing popular support to protect the land and the religion from the Soviet occupation. In the face of insurmountable power and brutalities of foreign soldiers, the Afghan struggle for independence depicts the biblical story of David and Goliath. A super power — the Soviet Union — unleashed the power of its armed forces and invaded the landlocked Afghanistan in a bid to secure its geo-political interests. The Afghan response was at the national level, and the subsequent years of the occupation, millions joined the resistance through non-violent means such as participating in the mass exodus from Afghanistan to neighboring Pakistan and Iran, or waging a battle with outdated rifles. The resistance to the Soviet invasion included nearly every member of Afghanistan's population.

The war of liberation was nationally and internationally termed jihad, an expression holding significant meaning in the psyche of the Afghans. The campaign of the 1980s was reminiscent of previous periods of jihad waged against the British in the nineteenth century. However, the 1980s struggle for independence was different in terms of the length of the war, retributive mass killings of the civilian population in order to suppress resistance, the resources and human power used to engage the superpower, and the involvement of a rival super-power,

the United States, and other regional states. The Afghan national struggle for independence acquired an international flavor that would prove to be detrimental to Afghanistan, as geopolitical interests and intrigues collided. The Afghans did consider the Soviets as godless communists, and the Soviet policies in Muslim Central Asia was an example that the Afghans would share the same fate. The Afghans had reason to fear that their land might become subject to Soviet domination.

This fear was exacerbated by the elites of the Afghan resistance who made an emotive appeal to Afghans' love for faith and territory and mobilized the people join the resistance. However, the national struggle became polluted by foreign intervention, as the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia found a lucrative opportunity to promote their own ideological programs. The Jihad allowed for the emergence of a new group of elites, very distinct from traditional elites in Afghanistan. The members of the resistance, or the Mujahideen adopted measures to suppress or replace existing customs, traditions, and social conventions with a new interpretation of Islamic injunctions. Afghanistan's rich and diverse heritage of music, art and culture, the product of centuries, was reduced to a skeleton. Afghans are very much attached to the legacy of their long history that predates Islam. The new rulers saw themselves as guardians of state, religion, and identity of Afghanistan and set about purifying and "Islamizing" state and society. The Mujahideen leadership reinvented Islam and Afghan society proved disastrous, and alienated them from the majority of the population that had escaped similar policies of the Communist in Afghanistan. Communist efforts attempted to reorganize society along Marxist-Leninist lines and never before had the Afghan national culture been under so much pressure. Afghanistan, it appeared was invaded by two sets of invaders. The Communist invaders were

foreign. However, so were the Mujahideen's policies. The Islam of the Mujahideen was not the traditional Islam of Afghanistan; this new interpretation of Islam was Wahabi Islam, alien and unwelcome, and unacceptable to the majority Afghans, because it disoriented them and separated them from their history.

The current political quagmire in Afghanistan is a recurring pattern of previous resistance movements. The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan has caused a response within the population. The Bonn Conference placed a virtually unknown individual as the "transitional" leaders of Afghanistan. Nine years later, Karzai is serving his second term as president and in the eyes of many Afghans, he lacks credibility, years of foreign occupation has yet to make an illegitimate government legitimate. Afghans are deeply concerned that their leaders were selected by foreign powers to suit their needs. The presidency has been fraught from the beginning with deceit and manipulation to keep out the popular former king Zahir Shah and ensure a leadership easily manipulated by the U.S. While Karzai was elected, he was promoted as a lesser of two evils — it was either him or another warlord. Most detrimentally, Afghans are disillusioned by the weak president and comprehend that both the presidential elections as well as parliamentary elections were fraught with fraud. As elected president, he has openly broken his promise and, in contravention to the wishes of the majority of the people, promoted well known warlords to government positions. This continued prevalence of warlords, used by the United States as proxies against the Taliban, negatively affects political developments in Afghanistan. Warlords continue to rule most of the country, and operate outside the jurisdiction of the weak central government. Ordinary Afghans are at the mercy of the warlords and have little or no protection from persecution by the local and regional commanders. Such realities lead to the

disillusionment of the Afghans and propel them in the direction of the Taliban. This status quo will remain, as long as an outside power, the United States has exclusive advantage over the country's political affairs, and United States troops have free reign in policing the country. The United States has jeopardized prospects for establishing stable and accountable institutions in Afghanistan, and this has undermined the security of the Afghan people. Most important, the United States military strategy in Afghanistan has undermined the legitimacy of the political process.

The Taliban are using Afghan grievances and successfully tapping into sentiments of Afghan nationalism and exploiting the policy failures of Kabul as well as its foreign patrons. The result is weakening public support for the central government. The Karzai government and the U.S. authorities must address the people's sources of alienation. In particular, Afghan grievances include arbitrary detentions, night raids and aerial bombings. Within Afghanistan, the Taliban are succeeding in exploiting the grievances of the people. The Taliban highlight civilian casualties and frame the military intervention in Afghanistan as a wider war against Islam. They claim that Islam is in danger, and Islam's prestige is at stake, and Afghanistan's traditions are threatened. The Taliban assert that it is the duty of Afghans to engage in a jihad against the foreign forces as well as the Kabul government. The Taliban justify the current fight as a duty incumbent upon each Muslim. The Taliban movement is a modern movement and a product of the social and political realities of modern Afghanistan.

The argument presented here is that the Taliban resistance is at its core a nationalist resistance to external forces and their Afghan allies, or perceived allies. In a bid to appear authentic, Afghan, and Muslim, their leadership makes references to a "return" to the "golden

age” in the history of Islam. It is imperative to dispel the orientalist/ fundamentalist myth that Islam is by its nature a political religion. There is a disconnect between the utopian reconstruction of the past and existing historical reality. This discrepancy between fact and myth making may be learned from studying the primary texts of Islamic political theory. For example, the jurists in charge of compiling the documents operated as state functionaries and therefore dependent upon state elites for patronage. Furthermore, the texts on Islamic political theory were prescriptive and not descriptive. Contemporary Islamists and Orientalists have incorrectly treated these same texts as describing a “golden age” of Islam.

With respect to the political interpretation of the Islam of the Taliban movement, political Islam should be understood as a modern movement responding to matters relating to the contemporary realities of the Afghan state. The Taliban may assert that they are fighting a holy war against foreign invaders in order to please God. However, this articulation and the utilization of religious expressions and symbols in times of crisis is an ancient method of resistance and spans vast geographic regions, cultures and peoples. In order to achieve some semblance of legitimacy, the Taliban leadership references an idealized Islamic political theory and promises to create a political order constituent with the fundamentals of Islam. In this sense, the Taliban did not invent a new ideology; they are manipulating the meaning of strategic words and symbols that hold significance in the hearts of Afghans. This strategy of referencing an edenic epoch or utopia in history has significant social and political functions. Interestingly, the irony of the utopia is that nostalgia can develop for things that have never really existed. The Taliban resurrect an ideal past from Islamic history is very distinct because the “golden age” of Islam is a reference to the faith’s early years under the authority of the Prophet Mohammad and the

subsequent four caliphs. The nostalgia for the past does not take into consideration that the first and most ideal of the Muslim communities as well as rulers of that community were Arab and identified with a specific region of the world. The glories of the early Muslims were not the glories of the Pashtun Afghans. Subsequent Islamic empires — that of the Ottomans and the Mughals was not Arab. One was Turkish and the other Central Asian. Furthermore, the Safavid Empire was Persian and Shiite. Regardless, the Taliban movement is an example of the response to alienation from the state structures and a search for authenticity. Nevertheless, the Taliban may use the blue print of the ideal Islamic state as an alternative to Karzai's administration. The Taliban are a modern political phenomenon; this is not a revival of an ancient Islam.

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