



The State and Social Contract in Afghanistan: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract:

This research is a historical analysis of the complex and evolving relationship between the state and society in Afghanistan through the lens of social contract theory. The research discusses how external interventions and internal enforcement mechanisms have imposed state structure on Afghanistan's multi-ethnic and tribal society. Through the theoretical framework of classical social contract theory and the state-building model by the OECD, the research assesses how the above variables have affected political development in Afghanistan. The qualitative historical analysis in the research, based on secondary sources, traces the trajectory of formation of a modern state in Afghanistan from the early encounters in the 19th century up to the collapse of the U.S.-backed Afghan Republic in 2021. It finds that external interventions have consistently failed to create a sustainable social contract since most of the state-building efforts were often exogenous to Afghan society's complex socio-political realities. Instead, such processes have encouraged centralized governance arrangements driven by a few elites, with heightened ethnic, tribal, and religious fragmentation leading to the undermining of state legitimacy.

Keywords: Afghanistan, state-building, social contract, external intervention, internal coercion, historical analysis

INTRODUCTION

Throughout its modern history, Afghanistan has been subjected to an externally-inspired political process that has largely come at the expense of establishing state structures and principles antithetical to the multiethnic and tribal, decentralized bases of Afghan society. The process of formation of a modern state as introduced into Afghanistan in the 19th century was first and foremost a foreign intervention that did little to foster any kind of social contract between state and

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Afghan society. Centralized governance models imposed by successive ruling elites, supported by foreign powers, did not pay attention to the local power structures and complexity of Afghan society; hence, it is one factor that has fueled continuous instability and disconnection between the state and its citizens (Rubin, 2002).

The internal divisions throughout the 20th century were repeatedly exacerbated by external interventions by the Soviet Union and the U.S. The superpowers, while ambitious to extend their geopolitical influence, did not manage to propose state-building agendas bound to result in a legitimate and inclusive social contract. Interventions did the opposite: they polarized different ethnic, religious, and political factions. Pivotal to that, the U.S.-led intervention following 9/11, although accompanied by unparalleled financial and military investment, appeared to be modeled around an extremely centralized politico-structural arrangement without due consideration for Afghan society's tribal, multiethnic character (Nojumi, 2012).

The result of such state-building efforts was a centralized system, which ignored the need for decentralized governance structures that might foster trust and legitimacy at the local level. Further, Afghan state reliance upon warlords, religious scholars, and tribal leaders for control of the provinces resulted in pervasive corruption, which continued to undermine the legitimacy of the state. This further caused failure in passing basic services or gaining the trust of the people through a centralized system among the marginalized ethnic groups. The tensions mounted and are one of the reasons for the resurgence of the Taliban in the recent years (Gopal, 2021).

Considering the same background, this research tries to analyze the state and state-building processes in Afghanistan from the 19th century to 2021, focusing on the study of external interventions along with internal coercions regarding how they shape the capacity of the state to make a social contract. This is accordingly carried out by an exegesis of efforts toward the evolution of the Afghan state, and consequently, the chief causes leading to the fall of the state; with broader analysis of state-building strategies which mismatched with the distinctive features of Afghanistan's socio-political environment. This research is significant because understanding historical failures in building a legitimate and inclusive state provides a wealth of insight into why Afghanistan remains politically fragile and unstable and provides critical lessons for future state-building efforts not only in Afghanistan but in other conflict-prone countries on imperatives of bottom-up approaches in concert with local dynamics and social cohesion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to explain the formation of modern state in Afghanistan, Rahimi (2017) offers a far-reaching critical review and argues that the country, with its current borders were formed in the 19th century owing to the imperial rivalries in the so-called Great Game between Great Britain and Russia. Afghanistan was made a buffer state under British patronage, followed by its introduction into the Euro-centric state system. Barfield (2010) has similar opinion on how the history of state-formation in Afghanistan. According to his views, Afghanistan's geopolitical location has governed its destiny throughout history and is often targeted by external powers: invasions from Persia, Central Asia, and India. Further, he opines that while the country's modern boundaries were shaped by imperial interventions in the 19th century, its internal political complexities remained oft neglected.

Meanwhile, Faqiri and Faqirzada (2021) focus on social barriers – mostly, the institutional settings of ethnic power, the role of ethnic elites, foreign interference, and traditional societal divisions – to the evolution of state in Afghanistan. They argue that ethnic diversity and the power dynamic have been manipulated by the elites to maintain their power and have prevented the process of nationalization. The study also reveals that foreign actors have taken advantage of these divisions for strategic purposes.

Arguing on the same lines, Papadopoulos (2019) refers to Charles T. Call's state-building theory to analyze three key gaps – capacity, security, and legitimacy – that Afghanistan has plagued across key dimensions while trying to develop a stable state. Papadopoulos (2019) explains that these gaps are all connected thereby displacing the Afghan state from assuming good governance. He believes corruption, the influence of local warlords, a Taliban insurgency, and the opium trade are critical factors that have caused the fault lines in state-building.

Whitlock (2021), meanwhile, has contributed to revealing failures concerning the state-building mission of the U.S. in Afghanistan in the book entitled "The Afghanistan Papers," showing a gap between what was officially presented and what actually happened. Drawing on secret interviews and internal documents, Whitlock (2021) exposes how U.S. officials consistently misled the public about the progress and challenges of the war, masking the systemic flaws that undermined the entire state-building effort. The book is a crucial source for policymakers in understanding the root causes that kept Afghanistan's journey toward stability slow and indicated large areas of deviation in goals and accomplishment of the U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, Edwards (2010) and Lake (2010) address more directly how state-building processes are linked to theory on the social contract. They explore how the sources of legitimacy from traditional locations, such as the tribal structure and the local modes of governance have been overlooked during the modern state-building processes. Edwards (2010) also criticizes the Weberian model of the nation-state, which has been applied rather uncritically in fragile contexts like Afghanistan. According to him, it does not substantially allow for those informal systems of governance that play an important role in societies like Afghanistan.

In the same regard, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2020) provides a comprehensive framework to understand state-building efforts in fragile and conflict-affected situations in the light of social contract theory. The main emphasis of this framework is on inclusion, transparency, and engagement at the local level for the processes of state-building. A more context-sensitive approach is advanced by it through the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders at all levels of governance. This relevance holds particularly useful for Afghanistan, in view of the fact that intervention by superpowers, excluding local actors, and over-centralization of power have been considered some of the key barriers against the healthy evolution of the state in Afghanistan.

Literature Gap

Although the above literature provides a comprehensive discussion on the state and state-building processes in Afghanistan, little focus has been paid to understanding the interaction between external intervention and internal coercion in imposing state structures on Afghan society. Existing scholarship either tends to emphasize foreign interventions or explore internal ethnic and political

dynamics in a parallel fashion without rigorously considering how these two interact in determining the course of state evolution. Therefore, further research is still needed in integrating both external and internal forces into one framework that shall consider how the former collectively impinges upon state-building efforts and the development of governance patterns in fragile societies such as Afghanistan.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is primarily based on the social contract theory described by philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1690 and 1762, respectively. They argue that the legitimacy of the state emanates from a contract between the ruled and the rulers. State development, in Afghanistan, has been the result of external actors and internal elites, with minimum input contributed by the people, leading to a fragile, shattered, and incomplete social contract. This research attempts to review how state-building processes succeeded or failed to create a legitimate social contract representative of Afghan society's needs and interests, as observed by Rousseau (1968) and Locke (1690). These dynamics are measured by the application of the OECD's model for state-building as a secondary framework. The model provides a clear benchmark against which the Afghan state's capacity to engage in effective governance, provide basic services, and maintain security over time can be gauged. This model also allows consideration of how external interventions and internal coercion affected these capacities.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This research is a qualitative investigation based on a constructivist paradigm to understand the state in Afghanistan. In this respect, the research is set within the social contract theory, insofar as it allows a framing of the extent to which the state authority in Afghanistan has been imposed from without or grown organically through a social contract. Also at the core of the analysis is the model of state-building put forth by the OECD, which underpins legitimacy, capacity, and security as pillars of effective state-formation.

The research is based on a qualitative historical analysis (QHA), specifically, comparative historical method that focuses on comparisons across different historical periods or events in a search for causal relationships and patterns. The comparative historical methods include:

Data Collection

The research intends to draw upon secondary sources of data, including historic documents, government records, treaties, and scholarly work.

Periodization

The analysis periodizes the history of Afghanistan into distinct, albeit rough periods of state-buildings. Comparing the respective periods determines the different ways in which external and internal actors have sought to impose state authority (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003).

Identification of the Themes and Patterns

The identification of the persistent themes regarding reliance on coercion, centralization of power, and marginalization of various ethnic groups is performed on the most minute level using the

historical data collected. These patterns are compared with their variations in different time periods (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010).

Causal Analysis

The comparative historical method is applied to test the causal relationship between different actors and factor to explain why, up to the present day, it is hard for Afghanistan to have a viable social contract (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003).

Interpretation and Synthesis

The last step synthesizes the findings, leading to more general conclusions about how external factors interacted in shaping the Afghan state. Combining these findings emphasizes that external geopolitical interests became preoccupied with imposing structures on states, which persistently disregarded any inclusive social contract and maintained the Afghan state in a fragile and unstable condition (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010).

THE FORMATION AND EVOLUTION OF A MODERN STATE IN AFGHANISTAN

The modern state in Afghanistan traces its origins back to the rule of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (1880 to 1901) and to the decades of political ferment and foreign intervention that heralded his rule. As he came to power, the state of Afghanistan was a highly fragmented, tribal autonomous region with weak central authority and heavy foreign interference from the British Empire and the Russian Empire, albeit as rivals, playing out a geopolitical game termed the Great Game.

The Rise of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan

Amir Abdur Rahman Khan came into power in 1880 as a consequence of the Second Anglo-Afghan War and the chaotic political scene leading from it. He was especially favored by the British because he was perceived as a strong ruler who could ensure power consolidation and the maintenance of order in Afghanistan. It was this capacity to gain British sponsorship which gave Abdur Rahman the means and legitimacy desired to overpower rival claimants to the throne, as well as tribal leaders who had traditionally resisted any central authority, that would be Abdur Rahman's big chance (Saikal, 2012).

How Abdur Rahman used the instrument of external intervention, especially British financial and military assistance, was one of the distinguishing aspects of his rule over Afghanistan. The money provided in the form of subsidies given to him, together with military equipment, went on to assist him in suppressing the spirit of internal opposition while at the same time imposing some sort of central authority on a society that was otherwise seriously fractured (Barfield, 2010).

External Agreements and the Shaping of Afghanistan's Borders

Another important element in Abdur Rahman's state-building was his tactical reach-out to the outside powers, especially in the demarcation of the borders of Afghanistan. The British, as Abdur Rahman's rule sponsors, worked in tandem with him in institutionalizing Afghanistan's boundaries so the latter could turn into a buffer state between British India and Russian-controlled Central Asia.

One of the most important agreements signed during the reign of Abdur Rahman was the Durand Line Agreement concluded in 1893, demarcating the boundary between British India and Afghanistan. The line, deriving its name from Sir Mortimer Durand, who negotiated it as a British diplomat, divided the Pashtun tribal areas between Afghanistan and British India, now Pakistan. The agreement stabilized British-Afghan relations and secured British recognition of Afghanistan's sovereignty. Nevertheless, it fenced the Pashtun tribes into two countries and sowed the seeds for further conflicts, which ushered in long-standing ethnic and political tensions (Schetter, 2020).

Reforms and Challenges from Within

Internally, Abdur Rahman's rule was marked by a series of reforms aimed at modernizing Afghanistan and centralizing state power. He introduced a system of provincial governance, where loyal officials were appointed to oversee different regions of the country, reducing the power of tribal leaders. He also reformed the military, creating a standing army that was directly loyal to the central government rather than to tribal or regional leaders (Rubin, 2002).

Reforms during Abdur Rahman's rule extended to the economy and the sphere of law. He instituted a state monopoly on trade and taxation, hence centralizing economic control in Kabul to ensure that revenue derived went directly to the central government. Reforms to the legal code included a system of state-run courts operating in conjunction with traditional tribal and Islamic courts, further undermining the power of local leaders and religious authorities (Shahrani, 2000).

The State During the Reign of Amanullah Khan

King Amanullah Khan's reign (1901 – 1929) pursued the goal of modernizing Afghanistan, but for the purpose of consolidating state power, often neglecting the actual needs of the people. His policies, however, were deeply influenced by foreign interventions and internal policy enforcement that often tried to clash with the traditional structures of Afghan society. The ambitious modernist project of Amanullah, impregnated with European models, was highly centralizing in conception and pushed reforms that ran counter to Afghan conservative religious and tribal mores.

External Intervention: Anglo-Afghan Relations and Independence

The regime of Amanullah Khan followed with attempts to emphasize the independence of Afghanistan from British influence. Decades previously, Afghanistan had been a buffer zone between the British Empire in India on one hand and Tsarist Russia on the other, with Britain exercising control over its foreign policy. This had changed following the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, when Amanullah declared full independence, a milestone formalized by the Treaty of Rawalpindi where Britain recognized Afghanistan's autonomy in foreign affairs (Saikal 2012; Gregorian 1969).

It is with this victory that Amanullah aimed to make Afghanistan an absolute independent state with no colonial rule. In 1921, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union signed a Treaty of Friendship, leading to the exchange of diplomatic relations, which, it was hoped, would balance British influence and align Afghanistan with powers such as the Soviet Union, Turkey, and most European powers (Adamec, 1994).

Internal Enforcement: Modernization and Reform Policies

Amanullah Khan had undertaken some wide-ranging reform efforts to transform Afghanistan into a modern, centralized state, drawing inspiration from European models of modernization, above all Turkey's Atatürk. His reforms impacted the economy, law, education, and societal system, hence attempting to drag Afghanistan away from its feudal and tribal origins toward a model of governance inspired by Western examples (Gregorain, 1969). These changes were therefore largely imposed without paying attention to the deeply entrenched tribal and religious frameworks in Afghanistan.

Amanullah's reformist program even went as far as including Afghanistan's first ever written constitution in 1923. Accordingly, for the first time in Afghan history, a constitutional monarchy was established. It also defined civil liberties and provided a formal legal government structure. The Constitution was to make the power of tribal leaders and religious authorities much weaker by concentrating authority in Kabul – obviously challenging the long-established, decentralized and tribal political system.

Social Reforms and Backlash

Social reforms, especially those touching on women's rights, were a very contentious matter for Amanullah Khan. He tried to modernize society by improving the status of women, promoting female education, diminishing bride prices, and abolishing such customs as polygamy and child marriage (Saikal, 2012). This was fully expressed through his wife, Queen Soraya, who would show herself in public without her veil – a symbol of change which disturbed more conservative fractions. These reforms faced serious opposition, especially among the more rural, tribal, and religious leaders, who saw them as intrusions into Islamic tradition and a challenge to their positions (Noelle-Karimi, 2014). The conservative religious establishment thus saw these efforts of secularization as undermining Islamic law and thus eroding the power derived from it.

External and Internal Factors behind Amanullah's Fall

The last years of Amanullah Khan's government were plagued by instability wrought by internal disaffection and external challenges. His reformist, secularizing measures were greatly opposed; the culmination was a widespread rebellion in 1928–1929 under the leadership of Tajik rebel Habibullah Kalakani, who overthrew Amanullah's regime with the support of retrogressive tribal and religious groups opposing modernization (Noelle-Karimi, 2014). Amanullah's failure was rooted in his move to rapidly modernize Afghanistan with inspirations from the West, without significant strategic backing on behalf of the conservative-minded Afghan masses. His centralist governance approach undermined long-entrenched tribal structures and created a power vacuum that Kalakani was able to capitalize on (USIP, 2019).

The State During the Reign of King Zahir Shah

King Zahir Shah's rule comprises a period of Afghan history from 1933 to 1973 in which the monarchy attempted modernization of the state against a background of complex internal and external pressures. The Afghanistan reforms during this era had been in the direction of centralizing authority and modernizing its institutions, yet clearly brought into focus the continued

salience of external intervention and internal enforcement in the attempt of the state to impose itself on a fragmented and diverse society.

External Intervention: Cold War Geopolitics and Economic Aid

During the rule of Zahir Shah, Afghanistan's neutral position vis-à-vis the Cold War did not save it from turning into a field for the Soviet-American race of influence. Both superpowers were much involved in giving considerable economic and military aid to win influence in Afghanistan's development. The Soviet Union was into infrastructure development, and the completion of the Salang Tunnel in 1964, in this regard, improved the connectivity between northern and southern Afghanistan and facilitated trade (USAID 2020). Aside from these, the other modernization projects that the Soviets undertook in the country included roads, power plants, and various military bases, while the United States focused on rural development such as agricultural and education projects to promote anti-poverty and anti-illiteracy measures. Probably one of the most well-known projects was the Helmand Valley Project in the 1950s that brought modern irrigation to make agriculture more productive (DTIC, 1983).

Internal Enforcement: Centralization and Constitutional Reforms

During his regime, Zahir Shah promulgated several basic reforms which provided the regime with a more centralized authority and simultaneously modernized the state. These reforms were crowned by the 1964 Constitution, which set up a constitutional monarchy. It was a signature document that established a parliamentary system of government with a bicameral legislature, comprising an elected lower house and an appointed upper house, while civil rights were protected by free speech and freedom of the press. It sought to limit the authority of the monarch by using different forms of legislative and judicial systems of checks and balances.

While the constitution allowed for political parties, these were heavily regulated, and democratic reforms were thus not fruitful (Saikal 2012; Noelle-Karimi 2014). Zahir Shah also possessed an extremely solid sense of authority and had obtained guarantee and commitment from both the military and bureaucracy, through which the monarchy could continue with its stronghold on the state and legitimized the inability of complete democratization in the country (Noelle-Karimi 2014).

Political Realignments and the Overthrow of Zahir Shah

By the early 1970s, growing popular resistance to the Zahir Shah regime, especially among the intelligentsia, urban class and leftist elements, was allied with economic deprivation and increasing regional instability to create conditions that marked a period of political realignment. The gross cause of the unrest included the dependence of Afghanistan upon foreign aid without visible concomitant results in the form of broad-based economic progress or political stability. It had difficulty addressing a set of critical issues related to unemployment, rural poverty, and social inequality. The government was facing disillusionment from key segments of the population (Saikal, 2012). In 1973, he was overthrown in a bloodless coup by his cousin and former Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud Khan, who established a republic and declared himself president.

The State under Mohammad Daoud Khan (1973 To 1978)

From 1973 to 1978, a period of great change and turmoil beset Afghanistan under the rule of Mohammad Daoud Khan. Daoud – an ex-Prime Minister, former member of the royal family – was

thrust into power via military coup d'état that overthrew his cousin, King Zahir Shah, thus ending Afghanistan's monarchy and establishing the Republic of Afghanistan.

The Coup of 1973 and the formation of a Republic

The bloodless 1973 coup of Daoud Khan was in reaction to the meager modernization process and his own political marginalization after his resignation as prime minister in 1963 (Saikal, 2012). Daoud removed the monarchy and established a republic, installing himself as president. During early years of his rule, he dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution, and concentrated executive power as measures of consolidating his authority. In 1975, he organized the National Revolutionary Party and established a one-party rule to more firmly establish authority within the central government. In the words of Rubin (2002), Daoud saw a strong centralized leadership as an integral part of the formula to modernize Afghanistan and stabilize a country severely divided along sharp ethnic, tribal, and religious lines.

External Interventions: Cold War Politics

Daoud Khan's regime worked under the Cold War compulsions that shaped the contours of Afghan foreign policy and its internal affairs. As the prime minister, Daoud had established close relations with the Soviet Union in heavy reliance on Soviet military and economic aid for modernization. As president, he pursued a strategy aimed at undoing Afghanistan's dependence on the USSR by strengthening ties with the United States and regional powers such as Iran and India (Emadi, 1990).

Daoud's foremost foreign policy goal was to achieve greater independence from Soviet influence, particularly as Soviet-backed communist elements, most notably the PDPA, achieved increased strength. In countering Soviet presence, Daoud looked for counterbalancing assistance from the U.S. and Arab states. In 1977, he received U.S. assurances of military and economic aid to reaffirm Afghanistan's independence (Rubin, 2002; Office of the Historian, n.d.).

Internal Enforcement: Centralization, Reforms, and Resistance

Daoud Khan's regime aimed at consolidating central authority over the tribal areas of Afghanistan and undertaking state-driven economic development inspired by Soviet models. However, his reforms concerning poverty reduction, land, and industrialization met fierce resistance among tribal and rural elites because these changes threatened their influence and power (Rubin, 2002). The inability to implement land reforms outright added friction in the relationship between the government and rural communities. Also, secularization policies such as secular education and literacy campaigns that Daoud pursued ran afoul of conservative values-especially in the countryside, where the mullahs retain immense influence and perceived such developments as eroding Islamic values. In words of Noelle-Karimi (2012), the evident tectonic tension between centralist reforms by Daoud on one side and the conservative pattern of Afghan society on the other nourished the rising resentment and unrest.

The Constitution of 1977 and Political Consolidation

In an effort to legitimize his regime and secure a strong basis of political order, Daoud in 1977 promulgated a new constitution. The new constitution implemented the formation of a one-party republic, aimed at functioning with only one legal political organization to be known as the National Revolutionary Party of Afghanistan. Moreover, the constitution vested executive power in the hands

of the president, granting Daoud the colossal powers of the government, military, and economy (Mousavi, 1997).

The Constitution of 1977 formed part of Daoud's general policy of consolidating power and institutionalizing his regime. Yet, through it, he missed every opportunity to overcome growing political and social breaches inside Afghanistan. Its very centralization of power alienated many of the tribal and religious leaders who had always looked with suspicion at Daoud's modernizing agenda. Further, by institutionally creating a one-party state, he further marginalized the PDPA which had the result of heightening tensions with the Soviet Union and exacerbating internal political instability (Rubin, 2002).

The Fall of Daoud Khan and the Saur Revolution

Daoud's increasingly autocratic policies and the sidelining of the powerful political groups, in particular, the PDPA, alienated him and created conditions for his overthrow. Sidestepped by Daoud, the PDPA was in a position to attain influence due to its good Soviet relations and penetration into the military and major state institutions (Wilson Center, 2017). The Saur Revolution, which took place in April 1978, was a successful coup led by the PDPA with pro-Soviet military factions. Daoud was killed in a period of bloody violence, and Afghanistan's communist era began. The new rule brought radical reforms, as the PDPA came with heavy Soviet backing, thereby initiating one of the deepest periods of political and social change the country had ever seen (Rubin, 2002).

The Afghan State from Saur Revolution to Soviet Withdrawal (1978–1989)

A communist regime in Afghanistan, controlled by PDPA, emerged after the Saur Revolution in April 1978. Thus, a decade of armed fighting began within the nation, supported by interventionist policies from the outside, especially from the Soviet Union, with the aim of propping up the unpopular PDPA regime. Attempts by the PDPA to forcibly introduce radical Marxist reforms on Afghan society, along with Soviet military intervention, invited wide resistance that quickly escalated into one of the most disastrous wars of the Cold War.

The Saur Revolution: Marxist Takeover and Initial Reforms

Under the leadership of Nur Mohammad Taraki, the PDPA seized power after the 1978 Saur Revolution and renamed the country as Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), a radical break from its predecessor regime. PDPA aimed at an overall change in Afghanistan based on Marxist values – land reform, women's emancipation, and the destruction of tribal and religious authority. Key reforms included the redistribution of land to undermine large landowners, and an attempt to secularize society – for example, the PDPA promoted legislation on women's rights, allowing them to go to school and banning bride prices and forced marriages (Saikal, 2012). This all-out social revolution was heavily resisted across the country, especially in rural areas, due to the deeply inculcated tribal and religious structures.

Soviet Intervention: External Support and Occupation

The PDPA government soon faced organized opposition everywhere and lost control of Afghanistan in the rapidly escalating anarchy. The uprising in Herat in March 1979, led by tribal and religious leaders, left several thousand deaths, including Soviet advisors, thus showing the fragility of the

regime, which called for Soviet military intervention (Rubin, 2002). On December 27, 1979, the Soviet Union launched an all-out invasion in support of the PDPA. Major cities fell almost immediately, and Babrak Karmal was installed as the new leader, replacing hardline Marxist Hafizullah Amin, who had seized power after assassinating Taraki earlier that year (Saikal, 2012). Over-reliant on Soviet military and financial aid, Karmal's regime was nothing close to governance, and enjoyed no legitimacy amongst the Afghan populace.

PDPA's Attempts to Consolidate the State

Throughout the Soviet occupation, PDPA tried to enforce a Marxist state than ever before because this party was dependent on Soviet military and political support. The regime of Babrak Karmal was relatively moderate. Contrary to Amin's regime, he encountered continued resistance from the tribesmen and Islamist elements. He derived his power from the urban areas because he had not been able to suppress the resistance in rural areas (Saikal 2012). Efforts at land reform and promises of social modernization fell flat, broadly due to the regime's association with Soviet occupiers and its reliance on coercive control. The state imposed order through a comprehensive structure based secret police, and military courts, which regularly used torture and extrajudicial killing – all of which further alienated the population and gave support to the mujahideen opposition (Rubin, 2002).

Mujahideen Resistance and External Support

The communist forces supported by foreign elements were strongly resisted by the united front of Islamists and tribal fighters, commonly referred to as the Mujahideen. In ideological and tribal terms, the assorted Mujahideen united in opposing Soviet influence. Foreign support was crucially embedded in this sustained resistance: Pakistan provided the overall logistical and training center, while Saudi Arabia and the United States gave substantial financial and military assistance to the rebels (Riedel, 2014). The U.S. involvement involved high technology arms such as Stinger missiles which neutralized Soviet fighter planes, thus changing the equation in the war. The more the war continued, the more entrenched and ensnared the Soviet Union became in an expensive and broadening war (Riedel, 2014).

Withdrawal of the Soviets and the Geneva Accords

Understandably, the Soviet intervention was facing a very active resistance by the armed forces of Mujahideen and growing losses within the Soviet contingent, not to mention increased international condemnation by the second half of the 1980s. As a result of these pressures, the peace negotiations resulted in the 1988 Geneva Accords between the Soviet Union, the United States, Pakistan, and Afghanistan; wherein the final outline included measures that ensured all foreign military forces would leave Afghanistan's soil. Soviet troops withdrew in February 1989, thus ending their almost decade-long occupation. The Najibullah regime was the one that nonetheless remained in office based on continued Soviet support. However, the internal enforcement weakened, and the civil war of Afghanistan continued with diverse factions contending for power that allowed the volatile hold of the PDPA against the continuous resistance (Saikal, 2012).

Civil War and the State Under Taliban's First Rule (1989–2001)

The period between 1989 and 2001 was replete with turmoil. It started with the Soviet withdrawal to the demises of the Soviet-backed regime. It was then followed by a devastating civil war, and then led to the rise of the Taliban. At all that time, there was a very aggressive intervention from the regional and global powers, fragmenting Afghan society even further. The Taliban finally won the civil war and imposed a rigorous version of Islamic rule, marked by internal coercion, especially against ethnic minorities, religious groups, and women.

The Civil War and Collapse of the Najibullah Regime

The Communist Government of Afghanistan, although defeated after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, was able to maintain power under President Najibullah for three more years due to Soviet support. This support stopped after the Soviet collapse in 1991, and in 1992, the Najibullah regime succumbed to the advancing Mujahideen forces, with him taking UN asylum in Kabul (Rubin, 2002). His removal created a power vacuum that resulted in a new civil war – the Mujahideen factions, which were united against the Soviets, began fighting one another. The involvement of external actors like Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia contributed to this war because they supported different factions based on their strategic interests (Saikal, 2012). The main factions included Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, Massoud's Jamiat-e Islami, and Dostum's Junbish-i Milli – manifesting the deeply ethnic and politicized divide of Afghanistan.

External Intervention and Fragmentation in Society

Beginning in 1992 with a ruthless civil war until 1996, the Afghans gave in to bitter rivalries, particularly in Kabul. In the middle of the war, being used as human shields by all sides, the Afghan civilians suffered the most. The support from Pakistan for Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Iran for the Shia Hazara Hizb-e-Wahdat exacerbated internal divisions and prevented any possibility of a stable government from materializing (Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2015).

As the fighting became strictly ethnic and sectarian, the Tajik forces under Ahmad Shah Massoud fought against the Uzbek forces led by Dostum, the Pashtuns of Hekmatyar, and the Hazara militias. Heavy, inconclusive urban warfare between warring factions devastated Kabul killing in their thousands of civilians, displacing hundreds of thousands, and destroying much of its infrastructure (Rashid, 2000). Afghanistan fragmented into various regions controlled by warlords, each enjoying foreign patronage with different designs on the country.

The Rise of the Taliban

It was in the chaos of the civil war when the Taliban became prominent: essentially, a movement of Pashtun religious students, trained in Pakistani madrassas (Rashid, 2000). Mullah Mohammad Omar led the Taliban and manipulated the Afghan weariness of war by using the pervasive desire of the Afghan people for stability. Its quick rise to power was abetted by Pakistan, which offered military and logistic support with the hope of installing a pro-Pakistan government in Kabul (Riedel, 2014).

In 1994, the Taliban captured Kandahar and then broke out into a wide expansion across southern Afghanistan. In 1996, the Taliban took over Kabul, forcing the other Mujahid factions, one of which was Ahmad Shah Massoud, to retreat north. The Taliban regime established the Islamic Emirate of

Afghanistan based on a strict adherence to Sharia law. It marked the beginning of a new era of internal repression as the Taliban sought to impose their version of Islamic government upon Afghan society.

Internal Enforcement: Repression during the Taliban's Rule

The Taliban regime in 1996-2001 was marked by heavy internal enforcement to reshape Afghan society in line with a very puritanical interpretation of Islam. This Pashtun-led regime perpetrated brutal suppression against ethnic minorities, especially the Hazara Shia, Tajiks, and Uzbeks, employing even terror campaigns to enforce control. The most serious incident took place in 1998 in Mazar-i-Sharif, where several thousand Hazara civilians were either killed or exiled as a form of punishment due to their opposition (Rashid, 2000). The rights of women suffered the most serious aggression under the Taliban regime since they practically excluded women from all spheres of public life (Human Rights Watch, 2001). The inflexible ideology of the Taliban even brought cultural destruction, most notoriously in 2001 when the Taliban blew up the Bamiyan Buddhas, which they saw as idolatrous; this was received with outrage throughout the world because of the loss of cultural heritage.

External Support for the Taliban

The large-scale external intervention, most notably by Pakistan, enabled the Taliban to gain hegemonic control. From military training to financial wherewithal, from strategic guidance to personnel, the Pakistani support remained the backbone of the Taliban. Pakistan viewed the Taliban as a means for fulfilling its strategic interests in Afghanistan, which included having Afghanistan ruled by a friendly government that would give Pakistan a form of 'strategic depth' against India and allow trade routes via Afghanistan to be developed (Riedel, 2014).

Saudi Arabia and the UAE also provided financial support to the Taliban. Both these countries along with Pakistan were the only three countries which gave official recognition to the Taliban regime. Saudi Arabia's support to the Taliban was partially driven by the religious solidarity in the sense that the Taliban and the Saudi Arabian government adhered to the most, strict interpretations of Sunni Islam (Rashid, 2000).

Fall of the Taliban: U.S. Invasion and Internal Resistance

After the September 11, 2001, attacks on Twin Towers and Pentagon in the U.S., the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden; thus, Afghanistan was invaded by the U.S. in October the same year. Backed by close NATO allies and the Northern Alliance – a coalition of all anti-Taliban forces led by successors of Ahmad Shah Massoud – the U.S. advanced rapidly and overthrew the Taliban regime. By December 2001, the Taliban had been forced from power after the new interim government was set under Hamid Karzai, with the U.S. support (Saikal, 2012).

The State in Afghanistan after U.S. Intervention (2001–2021)

The U.S.-led intervention that began in Afghanistan in 2001 ushered in two continuous decades of state-building, heavily dominated by external intervention and internal mechanisms of enforcement. The U.S. intervention was for the dissolution of the Taliban regime, to eradicate terrorism, and establish a democratic government. While initial successes were abounding, the

efforts on long-term sustainability had to struggle alongside internal divides and challenges to governance.

The U.S.-Led Intervention and Fall of the Taliban

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan under Operation Enduring Freedom after the 9/11 attacks with the objective of defeating the Taliban regime and neutralizing Al-Qaeda. Within several weeks, the Taliban had fled Kabul, retreated into the mountains and onto Pakistan (History Army, 2022). By December 2001, U.S. and Coalition forces controlled much of Afghanistan. The UN-brokered December 2001 Bonn Agreement outlined a program of political reconstruction with an interim government led by Hamid Karzai. It chalked out steps toward democratic governance, a constitutional framework, elections, and rebuilding security forces. However, the exclusion of the Taliban in these negotiations created the seedbed for the ongoing insurgency against the new Afghan government.

Building the Afghan State

The Bonn Agreement thus cast Afghanistan as an ambitious, international state-building project, led by the United States and NATO. There was allocation of billions in foreign aid apparently for rebuilding infrastructure, democratic institutions, and an able government bureaucracy. However, by 2006, a Taliban insurgency had re-emerged despite substantial military aid available for combatting the threat (Rubin, 2002).

The constitution of 2004 formed the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and introduced a strong presidency, a bicameral legislature, and civil liberties, including women and minority protections, for a real reflection of Western democratic principles combined with Islamic law (Nojumi, 2012). In that respect, the centerpiece of this effort was the creation of the 350,000 Afghan National Army and Police personnel by 2014, trained by NATO; however, the Afghan forces remained dependent on international support for air support, logistics, and intelligence, thus having limited independence of operation (Barfield, 2010).

Internal Enforcement of a Highly Centralized Republic

The 2004 Constitution established the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan with a highly centralized governance model. Herein, power was placed within the Kabul executive branch. This system propelled the presidency and a small political elite into key decisions, significantly reducing provincial or district-level autonomy. In these ways, local governance was weakened: officials, such as governors and police chiefs, were appointed by the president himself with very little input from locals; this undermined regional self-determination mechanisms (Ruttig, 2012). This top-down structure alienated provincial communities because many felt powerless to address regional issues or represent local interests effectively (Goodhand & Sedra, 2013).

U.S. Drawdown and the Afghan Peace Process

Following Afghanistan's disputed 2014 presidential election, which concluded with a power sharing compromise between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, the United States began reducing its military presence in the country. In December 2014, the ISAF mission drew to a close, to be replaced by Resolute Support Mission (RSM), whose mandate was training and advising, not combat. But with the withdrawal of the international troops, the Taliban also regained much

control, especially in large parts of the rural areas that had sparse marks of the central government. Comparatively, the Afghan security forces were poorly equipped, and their performance was abysmal amidst corruption, high desertion rates, and low morale – all factors worsened by the loss of U.S. air support (Schroden, 2021). The 2020 Doha Agreement laid out terms for the complete withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces in exchange for Taliban commitments against the hosting of international terrorists and starting a peace process, though Taliban attacks on Afghan forces continued (Ruttig, 2021).

Fall of the Republic and the Return of Taliban Rule

The fall of the Afghan republic was then hastened under the Biden administration, with the climax of the fall of Kabul in August 2021. The Taliban 2.0 had taken advantage of the withdrawal of American forces through a speedy offensive, capturing provincial capitals and key cities with scant resistance from Afghan security forces. By mid-August, the Taliban 2.0 had already entered Kabul City, and President Ashraf Ghani had already fled the country. This was obviously a very rapid collapse of the Afghan government, which only reflected the fragility of a state developed so far through external intervention with little internal legitimacy and cohesion (Gopal, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The history of Afghanistan, from the late 19th century to the present day, has truly been a tortured one in which there has been little indication that the conception of social contract between state and society has managed to set in. It is a development marked by recursive cycles of external intervention and internal enforcement, often imposed from above rather than organically negotiated with Afghan society – the development that began especially in the times of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan and then passed through US intervention to the fall of the Islamic Republic in 2021.

British financial and military support for Amir Abdur Rahman's centralizing policies in the late 19th century managed to lay, through coercive internal measures – including the brutal repression of tribal autonomy and ethnic minorities – the basis for a modern Afghan state. The establishment of the Republic under Mohammad Daoud Khan after the 1973 coup represented another centralization driven by external Soviet support along with internal authoritarianism. However, like his predecessors, the state-building efforts of Daoud met with widespread popular resistance and eventually were defeated under the weight of internal discontent and geopolitical pressures.

From 1979 to 1989, the Soviet occupation further widened the gulf between the state and Afghan society. The Soviet-backed communist government tried to impose Marxist reforms against fierce resistance by conservative rural people and Mujahideen fighters with outside powers like the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Most dramatically, this period highlighted the weakness of imposed state structures from the outside and the failure to develop a legitimate social contract that represented Afghanistan's deeply divided ethnic, tribal, and religious communities.

Whereas the period after the US-led intervention saw the multi-billion investment of international capital in rebuilding the institutions and infrastructure of Afghanistan, culminating in the formation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, an attempt at establishing a modern, democratic state became affiliated with dependence on foreign aid and military support and corruption and inefficiency stemming from within, which weakened legitimacy for the new state. This gap between

state authorities in Kabul and local power structures was a little later underlined by the resurgence of the Taliban insurgency, rooted as it was in dis-enfranchised rural populations. The ultimate collapse of the Afghan republic in 2021 underlined how far a state – which had never fully secured any kind of social contract with its people – was from being consolidated.

Throughout its history, Afghanistan has struggled to balance the centralizing ambitions of its rulers against a diverse, decentralized, and highly autonomous nature of its society. The outside interventions that aimed at the creation or maintenance of the Afghan state – whether British, Soviet, or American – were more often than not concerned with geopolitical objectives rather than the fostering of genuine social cohesion. Consequently, these interventions did not develop a sustainable social contract but resulted in cycles of state collapse, insurgency, and external re-intervention. It is from this historical examination that one may find the current struggle of the Afghan people in their desire for a working state deeply hampered by their divided society and the repeated imposition on them of external models of government.

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