

THE BARAKZAI DYNASTY

Shah Shoja, however, soon lost the throne, and his brother Mahmud Shah also fell from power in 1826 at the hands of Dost Mohammad Khan, the first leader of the Barakzai dynasty. This dynasty, the last in Afghanistan, would last a century and a half, until 1973, when Zahir Shah, who is still alive today, was deposed. Dost Mohammad ruled, with one interruption, for over thirty years until his death in 1863. His reign is characterized by some of the most significant events in Afghan history.

In the mid-nineteenth century, two of the world's great powers, Russia and Great Britain, were engaged in a conflict that came to be known as the "Great Game." The British had political and trade interests in India, and they felt threatened by Russian incursions southward into Central Asia. The British saw control of Afghanistan as critical to maintaining the balance of power in the region. However, they did not feel that Dost Mohammad was either powerful enough or friendly enough toward the British to resist Russia if it should decide to expand into Afghan territory. Thus, they embarked on a course of action that would soon lead to the first Anglo-Afghan War in 1839.

This war would signal a major shift in the politics and subsequent history of the region. Since the era of the invasions of Genghis Khan and Timur, Afghanistan and its neighbors had fought only among themselves over their own region. Now, for the first time in centuries, an outsider with no links to the region and with an agenda of its own that had nothing to do with the well-being of the country had set its sights on controlling Afghanistan.

IN THE CROSSFIRE OF WORLD HISTORY

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Afghanistan had gone through centuries of shifting borders, a low level of national organization, and even occasional anarchy, punctuated with a few eras of strong leadership by a charismatic king, sometimes Afghan in origin and sometimes not. Not since the time of Timur had someone from far outside the region attempted to gain control of Afghanistan. Events in the early nineteenth century, however, set in motion a new legacy of outside interference that continues to the present day.

AFGHANISTAN ON THE WORLD STAGE

When Dost Mohammad, founder of the Barakzai dynasty, became the leader of Afghanistan in 1826, he focused on strengthening Afghanistan's defense of its territory against Persia and others. However, despite his desire to present a united front to the powers on Afghanistan's borders, the country lacked strong national unity because the regional warlords saw little to gain by giving up any of their autonomy.

From their capital cities thousands of miles away, the leaders of Russia and Great Britain observed Afghanistan with increasing interest. It was the era of colonialism, when European countries established colonies on other continents because it appeared that the only way to remain a top economic and political power in Europe was to dominate around the globe. Great Britain, for example, had taken control of the Indian subcontinent (which then included present-day Pakistan) and had a very profitable colony in operation there. Russia, already by far the largest country in the world, stretched from the edge of Scandinavia in the west to China in the east, and was eyeing Central Asian territories to the south. Acquiring lands in Central Asia would provide outlets to the Indian Ocean as well as new natural resources for the Russian economy.

Dost Mohammad Khan kneels in his chambers overlooking his Barakzai dynasty.



At the time, Russia and Great Britain were two of the most powerful empires in the world, and they saw control of Afghanistan as critical to achieving their economic and political aims. They each believed that Dost Mohammad Khan was a weak ruler who would probably be unable to force provincial leaders to go along with any treaties he made with foreign countries. It seemed wise to both Great Britain and Russia to take control of Afghanistan themselves. Great Britain did not really want to colonize the territory as it had with resource-rich India, but it knew that if Russia gained control, it would not be long before Russia used its position there to make a move on India. Great Britain, therefore, wanted Afghanistan to serve as a buffer, and it was not confident that Dost Mohammad had the power or the desire to help achieve this.

THE ANGLO-AFGHAN WARS

The British made a fateful decision shortly after Dost Mohammad took the throne, a choice that would result in great bloodshed and a legacy of mistrust of Europe and the West that continues in Afghanistan today. After diplomatic discussions with Dost Mohammad failed to produce a treaty or even an agreement of neutrality, the British decided to overthrow him and reinstall former Shah Shoja on the throne. The idea was that Shoja would owe allegiance to the British for their support, thus allowing the goal of British control over the area to be achieved. In 1839, British troops invaded Afghanistan in a successful attempt to put Shoja on the throne, signaling the beginning of what would become the first of three Anglo-Afghan wars. Dost Mohammad's family was captured by the British in 1840, forcing him to surrender and go into exile.

The national unity Dost Mohammad could not achieve as ruler briefly came to pass as the Afghans struggled against the British. In 1842, the British lost their control over the government when Shoja was killed in an uprising. The British forces tried to retreat back through the Khyber Pass into their Indian

Afghan rebels chase the British forces through Khyber Pass in the first Anglo-Afghan War.



colony after their leader was killed. This was accomplished by a seventeen-year-old Afghan, Akbar Khan, whose act of defiance has made him one of the country's national heroes. In one of the most remarkable campaigns in Afghan and British military history, 16,500 British soldiers and their 12,000 dependents were wiped out, not in large pitched battles but little by little through ambushes, killing of stragglers, sniper fire from clifftops, and other means. Only one ragged survivor on a staggering pony made it back to the British fort at Jalalabad, a tale dramatically told and retold in British history books. Later, the British did manage to reinvade, primarily for revenge, but they were pushed out again by the Afghans by the beginning of 1843. This signaled the end of the first Anglo-Afghan War.

Dost Mohammad Khan retook the throne and ruled until his death in 1863. Another period of instability followed as his sons jockeyed for the throne but could not unify the country or protect its borders. Great Britain and Russia continued to view the area with great interest, although neither attempted to grab territory. In 1873, Afghanistan negotiated a treaty with Russia that established a clear border between the two countries and included, in exchange for some Afghan land along the Amu Dar'ya River, a Russian agreement not to invade Afghan territory. When Afghanistan's relationship with Russia improved, the British began to worry. They did not trust that the new ruler, Dost Mohammad's son Sher Ali, would be able to remain neutral and thus keep Afghanistan a buffer state.

In another attempt to keep the Russians at bay, the British started the second Anglo-Afghan War in 1878. Sher Ali was unable to pull together a united defense and, while fleeing the country, died in Mazar-e Sharif in 1879. His son briefly inherited the throne before being deposed in 1880 by Abdor Rahman after the battle at Maiwand. Maiwand produced one of the great legends of Afghan history, Malalai. As the story is told, the Afghan warriors were retreating in defeat but Malalai used her veil and her stirring words to rally them back into battle, where they ultimately annihilated the British. After Maiwand, with Abdor Rahman on the throne, the British negotiated a withdrawal from Afghanistan on the condition that they be allowed to dictate Afghanistan's foreign affairs and that the Khyber Pass and substantial other lands would become part of Britain's Indian colony.



Over the next few decades, border agreements were negotiated and renegotiated with Russia, Great Britain, and Persia (present-day). As a result, Afghanistan lost much of its outlying territory but gained clear borders and agreements not to violate them. By the time Rahman Khan's son and successor, Habibollah, died in 1919, the country had taken on its geographical shape as a modern nation. However, the next ruler, Amanollah, resented the fact that the British dictated Afghanistan's foreign policy. He knew that Britain's involvement meant that Afghanistan was not really an independent nation. Amanollah invaded India as a way of announcing an end to British power over Afghanistan, prompting the third and final Anglo-Afghan War in 1919. Amanollah was successful in his objective. The Treaty of Rawalpindi in 1921 ended British control over Afghan affairs and established the country as fully independent.

Dost Mohammad Khan sits cross-legged reading over a land treaty with Russia that caused the second Anglo-Afghan War.

AMANOLLAH AND NADER KHAN

Before Amanollah's time, Habibollah had been the first to recognize that Afghanistan would be at an increasing disadvantage with foreign powers if it did not modernize. He founded schools, encouraged the development of factories, improved roads, and established a weekly newspaper. He introduced Western medicine, electricity, and automobiles to the country, and he invited intellectuals such as Mahmud beg Tarzi, who had been exiled during more conservative times, to return to Afghanistan to help promote modernization.

Habibollah's son Amanollah, who ruled until 1929, also supported fashioning an independent Afghanistan along more modern, Western lines. Amanollah, under Tarzi's influence, promoted the idea of a constitutional monarchy, in which there is a king but elected officials run the government. Amanollah was popular and respected throughout his reign for his willingness to put the development of a strong, well-functioning nation above his own personal power. However, resistance to reform was great among some groups, and Amanollah was deposed in 1929. Despite this, he retained a great deal of support. In the end, one of these supporters assassinated the new ruler, Nader Khan, in 1933, partly over the issue of reforms but also because his rule was repressive and retaliatory by comparison. Nader Khan's personality made him suspicious of others and isolated him from those whose support he needed.

ZAHIR SHAH

Nader's son Zahir came to the throne at the age of nineteen. Because he was so young, he stayed in the background while his uncle, Mahmoud Khan, made decisions for him, an arrangement Zahir found himself unable to end even when he reached a more advanced age. In 1964, a constitutional monarchy, severely limiting the ruler's powers, brought Afghanistan in line with other modern nations such as Great Britain and the Netherlands. The constitution banned royal family members from holding office, and Zahir was able to push Mahmoud Khan aside and come into his own right as a leader. Zahir Shah ruled for forty years, until 1973. He tried to modernize Afghanistan through projects to develop irrigation systems and highways. He also instituted social reforms that permitted

women to enter the workforce, hold government positions, and study at universities. In addition, he began modernizing and strengthening the army, largely with aid from the Soviet Union.

Late in Zahir's rule, Afghanistan endured several years of drought, adding to the difficulties of survival for the typical Afghan. In addition, a movement to establish a separate independent Pashtun state, Pashtunistan, in the border region with Pakistan, undermined Zahir Shah's rule. While on a European vacation in 1973, Zahir was informed he had been deposed, ending not just the Barakzai dynasty but the monarchy itself. Afghanistan declared itself a republic, and the leader of the coup, Zahir's brother-in-law Mohammad Daud, took over the new role of president.

**THE DURAND LINE AND PASHTUNISTAN**

In 1893, the British, who controlled the area of present-day Pakistan as part of their colony in India, drew a clear national border between Afghanistan and their colony. This border became known as the Durand line, named after the Durand Treaty that established it. This border, like so many others elsewhere in the world during the colonial era, was drawn without concern for the people who lived in the region; it simply reflected what lands the colonial power controlled at that particular moment. The result was that ethnic groups often became divided between two countries in ways that made little sense to them. This was the case for the Pashtuns with the Durand line. Their traditional territory extended on both sides of this new border, and they were used to moving freely throughout the area. Suddenly they found themselves part of two separate governments, each Pashtun a citizen in one part and a foreigner in the other part of what they saw as their ancestral land.

This became a major problem for the Pashtun when Pakistan became a separate nation in 1947. In 1949, Afghanistan announced that it would no longer recognize the Durand line. The Pashtun, who referred to Pashtun territory in Pakistan as "occupied Afghanistan," proclaimed a separate nation of Pashtunistan, encompassing Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province and other western borderlands. For a while, civil war seemed imminent. However, the nation of Pashtunistan was never recognized as a sovereign country by other nations in the world, and Pakistan retained the land east of the Durand line. Tensions have continued over the issue into the present day, with many still supporting the idea of an independent Pashtunistan, citing the many new central Asian republics such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as examples of lands based on the ethnic majority found there.

THE MARXIST EXPERIMENT

Eight years before the fall of the monarchy, a small group of Afghans had begun meeting secretly to discuss the best methods to develop their country along the lines of the Soviet Union, their neighbor to the north. Afghan Communists favored modernization but disapproved of the Western philosophy of capitalism, which stresses competition among individuals for personal financial profit. Instead, they wanted to see Afghanistan evolve based on the principles advocated by German philosopher Karl Marx, who argued that the ideal society is one where everyone works together for the benefit of the whole and no one becomes rich at someone else's expense. This philosophy, called Marxism, became the foundation for communism, already in place since the 1920s in the Soviet Union. Under communism, people work in factories, farms, mines, and other workplaces known as collectives. The government provides the needed machinery and supplies, and the workers give what they produce to the government. Because people do not work for themselves, the government is also responsible for making sure everyone has food, shelter, and other necessities.

The Soviet Union was pleased to see this attempt by Afghan Marxists to create a new Communist state. According to writer Pankaj Mishra in "The Making of Afghanistan," "Communism offered [Afghanistan] both a way of catching up with and resisting the West, and the ideology had a powerful, and often generous, sponsor in the Soviet Union."³ Members of this Marxist group, known as the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), ran successfully for election to parliament and began working to promote Marxist ideas. Mohammad Daud, though not a Communist himself, became aligned with this group because he thought they might help his own political future, and when Zahir Shah was overthrown in 1973, the Communists did indeed turn to Daud to be the new president and head of the government.

Afghan Communists, who tended to be members of the educated elite, had, from the very beginning, divided into two feuding factions in the PDPA: the Parcham (translated as "flag" or "banner") and the Khalq (translated as "people" or "masses"). Though there were ideological differences, the enmity between the two groups was largely the result of quarrels between their leaders over power; this infighting distracted both Parcham and Khalq from the goal of putting a Marxist system in place.

After the Communists helped Daud become president, he quickly tried to distance himself from those who had backed him, and to loosen the country's links with the Soviet Union. Daud was convinced that communism would not take hold in Afghanistan because it was a doomed effort "to weld the incoherent ethnic-tribal worlds of Afghanistan" into a single, centrally managed society. The Khalq and Parcham factions briefly settled their differences and joined together to get rid of Daud, who was murdered in a 1978 coup.

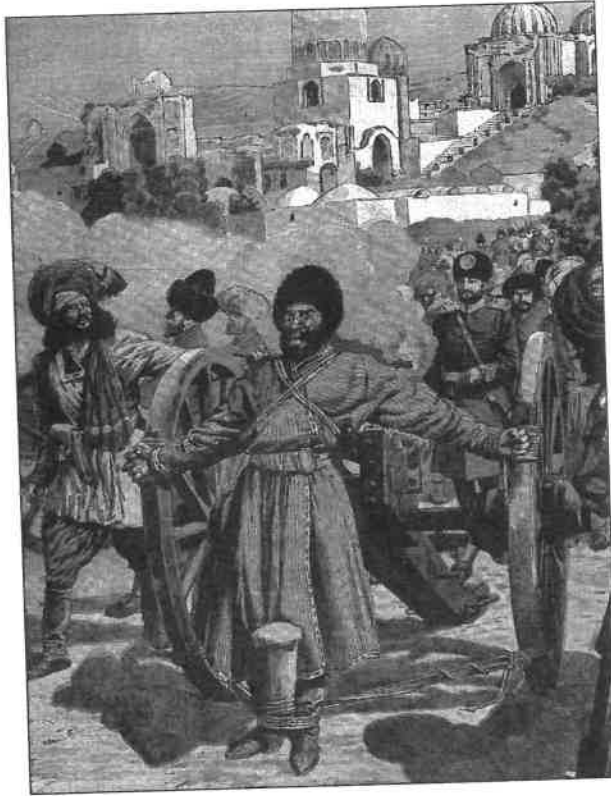
THE AFGHAN CIVIL WAR

Once Daud had been replaced and more committed Marxists and pro-Soviets were in control of the government, they acted quickly to make up for lost time. They began with hastily conceived land reforms in which anyone with more than six acres of farmland had to give up the rest for redistribution to others. This angered many Afghans, not just because they saw the Marxists as destroyers of traditional ways, but also because agriculture was already so difficult in the country and the land reform idea seemed likely to create more problems.

Adding to the problem was the fact that Communists are associated with atheism and believe that social progress cannot be made as long as people look to prayer and devotion to God as a means of managing their lives and solving their problems. During the several decades that the monarchy, and then the republic, had been stressing modernization, concern had already been growing among many Afghans that life was changing too much and too quickly. They felt that devotion to Allah and focus on the Qur'an for guidance was taking a backseat to modern ideas. The Marxist government did not actually move to close mosques or suppress the practice of Islam; in fact, it wanted to find a way to create a society that included both Islam and Marxism. Nevertheless, the association of communism with atheism served to intensify many Afghans' fears that Islam would be undermined if the Marxists remained in power.

The country's leaders responded to this unrest with force, arresting and executing tens of thousands of ordinary citizens. Specially targeted were political and religious figures, teachers and student protesters, and certain ethnic minorities, such as the Hazara, who had long been persecuted by the Pashtun ruling class for their Shiite beliefs. As a result, by 1975, armed insurrections against the Marxist government began. At the heart

Fearing an uprising, Marxist leaders execute Afghan citizens with radical political or religious beliefs.



of these uprisings were Muslims whose motivation was to reestablish a society with Islamic beliefs and practices at its core. These fighters were known as the mujahideen, which means "those who strive." As resistance to the Marxist government grew over the next few years, seven different mujahideen groups emerged, united by the desire to return to traditional ways, but divided along ethnic and regional lines by a long history of mistrust of and dislike for each other.

THE WAR WITH THE SOVIET UNION

Uprisings among the masses were matched by quarrels within the PDPA itself. These quarrels often turned deadly. President

Nur Mohammad Taraki, who was closely aligned with the Soviet Union, was murdered in 1979 by supporters of Hafizullah Amin, who favored more moderate and slower-paced reforms. The murder of Taraki was deeply alarming to the Soviet Union, for it was becoming clear that the Marxist revolution it had hoped for was not going to occur. Furthermore, the mujahideen had grown in strength, and it seemed only a matter of time until a new, Islam-centered, unfriendly government would be in place in Afghanistan. The Soviets knew they needed to move quickly if they were to salvage the situation.

In December 1979, thousands of Soviet troops were airlifted into Kabul. The Soviets took over the government after first killing Hafizullah Amin. They put another hard-line Communist, Babrak Karmal, in his place as what is referred to as a "puppet" president, one who does the bidding of a foreign power rather than that of his own people. But the Soviets soon learned the same lesson the British had during the previous century. All over the country, guerrilla fighters resisted the Soviet army by whatever means they had at hand, and the country settled in for another prolonged period of bloodshed.

The invasion of Afghanistan came during the period known as the cold war, when the United States and other allies were engaged in a power struggle with the Soviet Union. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States and its other Western allies saw a chance to weaken the Soviet Union by involving it in a long, unwinnable war. In the early 1980s, the United States began supplying arms such as shoulder-fired missile launchers called "stingers" to the mujahideen. In fact, the United States, carried out one of the most massive covert operations in history, channeling \$700 million a year into the Central Intelligence Agency for support of the mujahideen. Because these expenditures were hidden, the United States could claim not to be directly at war with the Soviet Union, but in fact it was a major sponsor of the conflict.

The mujahideen, based deep in the mountains, could not easily be captured or killed and could count on having enough arms and ammunition to keep fighting. Despite the stalemate, the Soviets refused to back down. Over time, many Afghans began joining the mujahideen, but not for reasons rooted in Islam or in anticommunism, or even to fight for their country's freedom. In a war-torn country, fighting simply became something for young men to do. Without a clear cause or goal, many mujahideen used

their American-supplied weapons as a way to get whatever they wanted, and over time they became a source of terror for many Afghans.

At home in the Soviet Union, opposition to the war mounted because it had no clear goal and was costing thousands of lives. Clearly, the Afghans had the upper hand. They could go on resisting indefinitely because they were well financed, they were on familiar territory, and, for many, armed warfare was already a traditional way of life. But the Soviet Union was not willing to admit defeat at the hands of a country it considered backward and globally insignificant, so the occupation dragged on. Uprisings in Afghanistan were dealt with by arrests, torture, and execution of suspects. The countryside was bombed in an attempt to frighten people into submission, setting in motion a flood of refugees fleeing in many cases from both mujahideen and Soviet terrorism. Approximately 5 million of Afghanistan's total population of 16 million left the country during the ten-year Soviet occupation.

Afghan mujahideen sit atop a Russian tank they captured after chasing the Soviets out of Gardez.



Coming into the country in the mid-1980s were countless Muslims from other countries, responding to the opportunity to fight for a cause. For some, the cause was a holy war, or jihad. Delivering Afghanistan from its occupiers was considered a sacred duty that would bring pleasure to Allah and earthly honor to those involved. Others looked at the Soviet-Afghan war with a more jaded eye. They could use their guns to get whatever they wanted, and there were monetary rewards for killing Soviet soldiers. Others had a larger picture in mind. Among those who arrived during this period was terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian who built boot camps for soldiers from as many as sixty other countries as a first step in his evolving plan for a worldwide jihad against the West. According to journalist Sarah Boxer, the foreigners who came to fight during the Soviet occupation "changed the look of the resistance and ultimately the look of Afghanistan."⁵ With virtually unlimited human and military resources, the resistance to the Soviets became entrenched, but it also stopped being solely about a fight for the freedom and future of Afghanistan.

Though the mujahideen presented themselves to the world as freedom fighters, the situation had become far more complex. In many respects, it simply resembled business as usual, but with bigger and more deadly arms, in a country characterized throughout history by violent rivalries. However, unknown to people at the time, a period of even greater violence was just around the corner. Meeting privately, in small "study groups," just as the Marxists had done several decades before, was a group called the Taliban. Their vision for the country would bring still more hardship and tragedy in the years to come.