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Experiment with Democracy, 1963–1973

THE SUDDEN RESIGNATION OF Prime Minister Daoud ushered in a complex phase in Afghan politics. While King Zahir Shah and his family branch assumed full power, this phase, which lasted a decade, witnessed a series of changes in pursuit of controlled democratisation of politics, liberalisation of social and economic life and rationalisation of foreign relations. For the first time since the accession of the Nadiri dynasty, the premiership and key Cabinet positions were not delegated to members of the royal family, and thus a *nominal* separation was made between the royal family and government. Although the general thrust of Daoud's approach to national development and foreign policy was maintained, an 'experiment with democracy' was unfolded to transform the political system into a 'constitutional monarchy'. A reform programme was initiated to broaden public participation in policy formulation and implementation, to foster the growth of a relatively liberal education and freer social and economic environment, and to conduct foreign relations with a closer eye on changing domestic needs and regional-international imperatives. It was also during this phase that fringe ideological extremism, nurtured largely in the context of an intensified polygamic-based power rivalry within the royal family, found root in Afghan politics.

The reforms, however, ultimately did not amount to a comprehensive process of structural changes. They were greatly strained in three ways. First, they were poorly planned and implemented in an ideological vacuum, apart from a broad patriotic discourse and neutralist stance in foreign affairs which had come to characterise the Nadiri rule since its inception. Second, on the one hand, Zahir Shah proved to be an indecisive personality, with a poor

understanding of what a transition from traditional to constitutional rule required, and on the other, Daoud retained his power ambitions to realise his own vision for Afghanistan. Third, in the context of growing Afghan-Soviet friendship in the 1950s, and America's neglect of the changing Afghan situation, many pro-Soviet Marxist elements, some of whom were protected by Daoud as instruments in his rivalry with the King, succeeded in penetrating the administration and armed forces. This provided Moscow with increasing influence in Afghanistan's domestic affairs, and eventually enabled Daoud to lead a successful republican *coup d'état* on 18 July 1973, terminating Zahir Shah's rule and the decade of the 'experiment with democracy'.

Change of Government

As was noted in Chapter 5, towards the end of Daoud's premiership the Afghan ruling elite had concluded that the time was ripe for constitutional changes¹ and a reasonable accommodation with Pakistan if the Nadiri dynasty were to continue its rule effectively, and Afghanistan were to reap greater benefits from Daoud's modernisation drive. Upon accepting Daoud's resignation and assuming the leadership, King Zahir Shah took the boldest decision of his career so far by appointing a non-Mohammadzai, Dr Mohammad Yusuf, to form a new government.² Yusuf was a German-educated scientist, who had served as Minister of Mines and Industry between 1953 and 1963 under Daoud.

The composition of Yusuf's Cabinet, which was confirmed by the King on 14 March 1963, and its initial policy pronouncements testified to a firm resolve on the part of the King that henceforth no member of the royal family would be allowed to limit his power, as had his uncles and Daoud in the past. They also indicated that he would seek to build popular legitimacy for his rule, and to modify foreign policy according to the changing national conditions, with a measured accommodation with Pakistan. The new 19-member Cabinet, although retaining six ministers from the Daoud period, was distinct from its predecessor in two ways: it included no members of the royal family, and was generally dominated by young technocrats. The key post of Defence Minister went to General Khan Mohammad Khan, who, although a Durrani Pashtun, did not have close affiliation by blood or marriage with the ruling family. He owed his promotion to the fact that he was a confidant of the King and had excelled himself, as commander of Kandahar province, in suppressing riots caused largely by the government's removal of the veil from Afghan women in 1959.³

In his first policy statement, while paying high tribute to Daoud for outstanding services to the nation, 'admirable energy, competence and

patriotism',⁴ Yusuf inaugurated what he called the phase of 'new democracy', so as not to appear to denigrate his predecessor's period as 'undemocratic', but rather to stress the need for constitutional reforms and a more representative government. He announced that whereas the past planned and guided approach to national development and the traditional foreign policy of positive neutrality would continue, the private sector would be encouraged to play a greater role in national development. He stressed that every effort would be made to strengthen Afghanistan's position as an independent non-aligned actor in global politics.⁵ Unable to repudiate Daoud's Pashtunistan policy,⁶ Yusuf moderated his pronouncements on it in pursuit of improved ties with Pakistan. Meanwhile, he praised the Soviet Union for its assistance in Afghanistan's development, and called for continued cooperation and friendship between the two countries,⁷ but with an emphasis on broadening links with other neighbours such as Iran and India, as well as the Muslim world and the West, the USA in particular. King Zahir visited Washington in September 1963, to dispel whatever doubts the USA may have had regarding the pro-Soviet leaning of the Afghan leadership, and to secure further economic support.⁸

The new government's early policy statements clearly reflected a new mode of leadership thinking, and provided important indicators about the imminent changes in the ruling elite's priorities and long-term objectives. They foretold greater political institutionalisation, broader public participation, and a freer social and economic life, with an emphasis on expansion of individual freedoms and initiatives, in conformity with the political needs under the King's leadership.⁹ The government's immediate priorities included finding a negotiated solution for the rupture with Pakistan; adopting a new constitution; and stimulating economic growth and attracting more foreign aid to continue the process of modernisation that Daoud had begun.

Afghan-Pakistani Relations

The Yusuf government swiftly extended an olive branch to Pakistan's President, Field Marshal Ayub Khan, and signalled its willingness to accept outside mediation. The Shah of Iran had sought to play a mediating role when he visited Kabul and Karachi in the summer of 1961, but his mission had failed given the personal feud between Ayub Khan and Mohammad Daoud and their extreme obduracy.¹⁰ The Shah now renewed his attempts at brokering a settlement. In May 1963, Afghan and Pakistani delegations met in Tehran, and reached an agreement to normalise relations between the two countries. Diplomatic, trade and transit links were restored; both sides pledged to conduct their duties in accordance with international law and to respect each

other's sovereignty. In general, this impressed upon the world community that Afghanistan was willing 'to put into cold storage the "Pashtoonistan" demand, which has so poisoned the relations of the two countries and proved so detrimental to the peace and security of the Middle East'.¹¹

During the Tehran negotiations, the Afghan government kept both Moscow and Washington informed of its position and the progress of the talks. The superpowers were pleased by this attention, but on the whole they viewed the Pashtunistan issue largely within the broader context of their global competition. In the words of a senior US State Department official:

We attempted... to dissuade the Afghans from pressing this issue, since it could have led to a war with Pakistan and created opportunities for Soviet intervention in both countries. Apart from these considerations the disposition of the Pathans has little strategic interest to us.¹²

In a similar manner, the Soviet leaders, who had at first interpreted the Tehran talks as an attempt by the West, or more importantly the USA, to manipulate Afghanistan,¹³ eventually welcomed the opportunity to distance themselves from Khrushchev's effusive and belligerent statements in support of Daoud's position. This was especially true after Khrushchev was removed from the helm in October 1964,¹⁴ for several reasons.

First, the Kremlin had gained some trust in King Zahir, who had professed to maintain friendship and cooperation with the USSR. Second, after Daoud's resignation, Moscow had reached a view that it might not be able to influence Afghan politics very much, and that the continued confrontation between Afghanistan and Pakistan could have unpredictable ramifications for the USSR. Third, the regional and international situation had taken a direction that made Moscow's overt support of Pashtunistan counter-productive to its interests. In the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Soviet leaders had become fully aware of the country's weaknesses, prompting them to adopt a more moderate stance towards the West.

The growing Sino-Soviet split also was not conducive to pursuing an adventurist regional policy. The Sino-Indian border war of 1962 facilitated a degree of Soviet-Pakistani rapprochement. India's acceptance of military assistance from the West created an impression in Moscow 'as if India and Pakistan were changing places, India seeming to be coming under American domination while Pakistan was slipping out of it'.¹⁵ In June 1963, the Pakistani Ambassador to the United Nations reported: 'The Soviets were very responsive to any move by Pakistan to establish better relations with USSR in economic or any other field.'¹⁶ The post-Khrushchev Soviet leadership doubled its efforts to woo Pakistan, by moderating its view that Kashmir

formed an integral part of India. In April 1965, President Ayub Khan visited the Soviet Union and was promised substantial Soviet loans as well as military cooperation. Undoubtedly, 'the two countries... travelled a long way since that fateful day in May 1960 when Khrushchev singled out Peshawar [in Pakistan] and threatened to wipe it off the world map'.¹⁷

Furthermore, the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 objectively strengthened the Soviet position in the region. The CENTO military alliance was crumbling: even the Shah of Iran, the staunchest US ally in the region, had become disillusioned with it, and dismayed at Washington's lack of support for Pakistan, another CENTO member, during the hostilities.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Moscow adopted an effectively double-edged posture. On the one hand, it continued its all-round assistance to India; on the other, it called for unconditional cessation of combat activities and offered mediation for a peaceful settlement.¹⁹ The Kremlin also despatched a message to the Afghan leadership, urging it to remain neutral in the Indo-Pakistani armed confrontation and behave in a manner conducive to the cessation of hostilities. Of course this advice was heeded, as it corresponded with Kabul's own changed attitude towards Pakistan.²⁰ But it did surprise many in the Yusuf Cabinet, most of all those like Dr Ali Ahmad Popal, Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, who had been an ardent champion of the Pashtunistan cause in Daoud's government. While some of these 'old faithful' tried to impress on their ethnic brethren across the border that had they been enfolded by Afghanistan they would have been spared the excesses of the war,²¹ the Afghan government as a whole assured Pakistan that it harboured no evil intentions whatsoever. Moreover, it did nothing to discourage the frontier tribes who 'tried to join the Pakistan armed forces to fight the infidel Hindu enemy'.²² As a result, Pakistan was able to redeploy its military resources from the Afghan border to the eastern front.

The warming of bilateral relations received a further boost during President Ayub's state visit to Kabul in January 1966. In the course of negotiations, both sides expressed the intent to strengthen the spirit of mutual understanding and undertook 'to create further conditions for friendship and cooperation', with the Afghan side reaffirming its hope for the 'fair resolution of the Pashtunistan problem which remains the sole source of differences between Afghanistan and Pakistan'.²³ In 1966, Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan had 'never been better. Pakistan, content with Afghanistan's playing down the "Pashtunistan" issue, pushes for more economic co-operation and trade, and trade has increased considerably since 1963'.²⁴ The atmosphere of rapprochement reached its high point in early 1967, when King Zahir visited Pakistan on an unofficial tour.²⁵

In the 1960s, many analysts pinned great expectations on the regional economic partnership known as the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD). Officially launched by Turkey, Pakistan and Iran on 22 July 1964, it was an offspring of the CENTO member-states' desire to foster economic, technical and cultural ties along the lines of the European Economic Community, and quite independently of the bloc's decaying military activities.²⁶ The idea of the RCD was floated by Ayub Khan on 12 June 1963: 'We feel great need of all-around collaboration and co-operation between Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and wish that the traders of these countries may also feel like us so that this strong combination may become invincible.'²⁷ It was argued that Afghanistan would be a major beneficiary if it joined the RCD, in terms of gaining economic, educational and administrative assistance without annoying the Soviet Union:

since increased Turkish, Iranian or Pakistani influence in Kabul no longer need to be interpreted by the Russians as American inspired or supported. In fact, it would seem unlikely that the Russians would wish to risk harming their recently improved relations with all of them by showing resentment over their increased presence in Afghanistan.²⁸

Yet the Afghan government consistently declined to accede to the RCD out of fear of compromising Afghanistan's neutrality; ostensibly, it had 'the unjustifiable suspicion that RCD is just a reincarnation of the western-inspired CENTO'.²⁹

In 1966, the Soviet Union reached the peak of its influence in the subcontinent. The USA, by then deeply involved in Vietnam, lost interest in performing the role of arbiter between India and Pakistan and even encouraged Soviet mediation at Tashkent: 'The two superpowers found themselves at one in denying the People's Republic of China any role in the region's affairs.'³⁰ The Tashkent Agreement, signed on 10 January 1966 to contain the Kashmir dispute, was no little feat.³¹ No country or international institution had proved able to persuade India and Pakistan to negotiate successfully before. Both parties withdrew armed units to the positions held before 5 August 1964, and created mechanisms to continue a dialogue over Kashmir. However, of the three participants in the talks at Tashkent:

the Soviet Union was the only one to emerge with unqualified satisfaction... Soviet diplomacy, long successfully excluded from the subcontinent... had made a dramatic breakthrough and proved itself a major factor in the power politics of South Asia. Finally, Russia, hitherto often labeled a potential aggressor by the West, was able dramatically to project herself as a peacemaker at a time when the US was escalating the war in Vietnam.³²

The Afghan leadership was particularly pleased in assessing Soviet peacemaking efforts.³³

The USSR continued its 'special relationship' with New Delhi and simultaneously tried to draw Pakistan into its orbit. President Ayub Khan visited the Soviet Union in 1965, 1966 and 1967, and Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin was accorded a warm welcome in Rawalpindi in April 1968. Kosygin agreed to finance the US\$100 million steel plant at Kalabagh, a nuclear power station at Rooppur, a radio link between Karachi and Moscow, a fishery and other industrial and agricultural projects. The Pakistani side, in a gesture of appreciation, discontinued the US lease of a communications base near Peshawar and recorded the 'closeness of views of the two governments on a number of international problems', including the war in Vietnam, the Middle East conflict and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.³⁴ While Soviet commitments to the development programmes in Pakistan were substantial, they still fell far short of the massive US aid which, according to experts in Moscow, prevented that country 'from conducting an independent foreign policy'.³⁵

In July 1968, delivery of Soviet arms to Pakistan commenced. India's and Afghanistan's loud protests subsided once it was revealed that Pakistan would not receive sophisticated weapons such as supersonic jet aircraft. At any rate, total Soviet military assistance to Pakistan remained negligible: up to 1979 it totalled only \$20 million, compared to \$450 million to Afghanistan and \$1,800 million to India.³⁶

The Soviet Union attempted to consolidate its gains in the region in 1969, when Leonid Brezhnev advanced the idea of collective security in Asia open to all Asian countries, including the Soviet Union, which emphasised its position as 'simultaneously a European and an Asian power', and its interest 'in having all the peoples in Asia live in peace'.³⁷ India and Pakistan quickly signalled that they were not interested in this proposal because of their unresolved disputes. Pakistan tilted towards the USA again and even provided its good offices in Sino-American relations in mid 1971 – a move which was objectively against its own interests, for it compelled the Soviet Union hastily to conclude an alliance treaty with India. This ultimately made possible Mrs Gandhi's victory in the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war,³⁸ resulting in the birth of the independent state of Bangladesh out of East Pakistan, which destabilised the situation in the region and further polarised all major players' positions.

Afghanistan's position vis-à-vis the Soviet-sponsored idea of collective security was more subtle. Its leaders, eager to maintain the country's neutral and non-aligned status, could not bluntly reject Moscow's proposal, given their vested interests in continuous Soviet economic and military support

and the friendly atmosphere that characterised the contacts between the two countries' leaders, but at the same time had no wish to offend China, against which the Soviet proposal was generally considered aimed. Consequently, they either evaded the question, or pointed to the unresolved problem of Pashtunistan and unsettled differences with Iran over distribution of the Helmand River waters in Sistan. Alexei Kosygin, who visited Kabul in May 1969, appreciated Zahir Shah's guarded position more than any other Soviet leader³⁹ and considerably relaxed the Soviet pressure. The joint Afghan-Soviet Declaration of 30 May 1969 stated:

the Soviet side praises Afghanistan's line of neutrality and non-alignment which creates important conditions for the achievement of tasks related to Afghanistan's progress and development, and whose earnest observation has earned Afghanistan respect of the peace-loving countries throughout the world⁴⁰

But the Declaration made no reference to collective security in Asia. For the time being Moscow decided not to pressure Afghanistan, which sympathised with the Soviet position on the war in Vietnam, nuclear disarmament, the Indo-Pakistani and Arab-Israeli conflicts and other international issues, and remained a major client in terms of economic aid, into an alliance with vague goals and an uncertain future. One has to agree with Morris McCain's assessment:

Events in Kabul went well from the Soviet standpoint through most of the postwar era. With the possible exception of Finland, Afghanistan represented the best-disposed and least threatening of Moscow's neighbours until the 1970s. Its friendship was maintained at little cost, the Americans seeming to accept tacitly that the country was both insignificant and firmly in the Soviet sphere of influence.⁴¹

Although the Soviet Union periodically resuscitated the idea of an Asian security system until 1975, and actually won the Shah of Iran's approval,⁴² the Kremlin accepted that caution, patience and prudence had to be exercised to achieve the best results in Afghanistan.

Reforms

The initial easing of tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan led towards a normalisation of relations, resulting by 1965 in the full reopening of the Afghan-Pakistan border, with Afghanistan regaining its valuable transit route. Against a backdrop of certain regional changes and somewhat improved US-Soviet relations, this created a favourable climate for the post-Daoud

leadership to intensify its domestic reform efforts, without initially dramatically impacting on the monarchy's power or causing undue concern to Afghanistan's neighbours, especially the Soviet Union. Yet the changes during the period of 'experiment with democracy', and the Afghan management of them, produced some inescapable fresh challenges and opportunities for the USSR and its allies. To understand this fully, it is now imperative to turn to those changes and their consequences, Daoud's use of them to regain power, and the USSR's manipulation of them to maintain its interests in Afghanistan and the region.

As mentioned earlier, Daoud himself, at the time of his resignation as Prime Minister, had proposed to the King certain constitutional reforms. But he had expected the reforms to be implemented according to his vision and not to block his return to politics at an appropriate time in the future. As Louis Duprée observed within two months of Daoud's retirement:

the step down... did not destroy the power potential of either Sardar Daoud or his equally capable brother, Sardar Mohammad Naim Khan. Actually, the move is politically adroit... I personally cannot conceive of either Sardar Daoud or Sardar Naim remaining in the background very long.⁴³

Daoud had all along intended, as subsequently became clear, to relinquish power only for a limited period, to provide the King and his supporters with an opportunity to improve relations with Pakistan and initiate the reforms. His medium-run aim was that once the reforms were in place he would be able to declare himself detached from the royal family, create his own political party and assume power again, but this time in his own right and on a more popular legitimate basis. It was in this context that Daoud not only consented to the King's appointment of a commoner, Mohammad Yusuf, to replace him, but also refrained from objecting to some of his senior ministers joining Yusuf's Cabinet, and from engaging in any action that could possibly encourage his numerous supporters in the administration and armed and security forces to undermine either the King's newly assumed powers or the functioning of the Yusuf government.⁴⁴ Although immediately after his resignation he made several public appearances and met with various influential figures, sparking rumours in Kabul of a comeback, possibly during a parliamentary session in September 1964,⁴⁵ he soon assumed a reclusive lifestyle, after the King and other members of the royal family urged him to do so for the sake of political continuity and stability.

In return, nonetheless, Daoud expected the King to honour their 'gentlemen's agreement' and proceed with reforms according to the blueprint that he had submitted. But this did not happen. The kind of changes, and

the manner in which the King and his supporters began to unfold them, rapidly caused Daoud immense personal political damage, prompting him to resume his power ambitions and rivalry with the King sooner rather than later. His quest for political redemption commenced shortly after the King set the constitutional reforms in motion.⁴⁶

Although Zahir Shah had developed a personal taste for democratic reforms,⁴⁷ the substance and direction of the reforms came to be prominently influenced by three forces. The first comprised members of the royal family. It revolved around the King's full-blooded uncle, Marshal Shah Wali Khan, who was retired but acted as an influential advisor to him, and Shah Wali Khan's son and the King's son-in-law, General Abdul Wali.⁴⁸ Daoud's resignation had finally provided both father and son with the opportunity to elevate their own branch of the family vis-à-vis Daoud. The second force consisted of a number of seasoned and ambitious political figures, such as Sayed Qassem Reshtia,⁴⁹ who had served under Daoud in various capacities but resented his immense personal power and dictatorial behaviour. The third force comprised a number of bright aspiring young Afghans who had received modern education in the West, perceived themselves well qualified to assume an active role in formulating and directing democratic reforms, and managed to link up in one form or another to the pro-Zahir Shah camp within the royal family. Mohammad Musa Shafiq, Dr Abdul Samad Hamid and, for a short time, Hamidullah were most prominent figures in that grouping. Although these three forces differed in their approach to democratic reforms, they were united in one goal: to avert Daoud's return to power.⁵⁰

The constitutional reforms proposed by Daoud had envisaged a strong, neo-patrimonial, one-party regime, where the King would retain only a ceremonial role, and the traditional *Loya Jirgah* would serve as a booster for an all-powerful head of Cabinet. Zahir Shah and other members of his royal branch perceived that:

Such a Constitution would perpetuate the de facto rule of Daoud Khan. His leadership had become too autocratic, disregarding the traditional collective decision-making of the royal family. A future prime-minister could use these powers... to completely alter the political system, even including abolishing the monarchy.⁵¹

The reformist elements in the power elite insisted on implementation of what Mohammad Yusuf termed 'Afghan democracy', based on retention of the monarchy, incorporation of traditional tribal institutions, strong parliamentarism, and 'cooperation of all classes of the nation, especially the educated people and the youth'.⁵²

It was in deference to the advice of these elements and to his resolve to rule in his own right that the King endorsed the process of reform. In the absence of a historical tradition, this was all to be a 'King's gift' to the nation, to be arranged by Yusuf's government at the monarch's behest. On 28 March 1963, Zahir Shah appointed a seven-member committee to draft a new Constitution to replace that of 1931, adopted by his father. Although he placed one of Daoud's allies, Sayyid Shamsuddin Majrooh (then Minister of Justice in Yusuf's Cabinet), to chair the committee, the remaining members came from the King's entourage. They were: Sayed Qassem Reshtia (Yusuf's Minister of Press and Information until December 1963 and Minister of Finance, July 1964–October 1965); Reshtia's radical liberalist brother, Mir Mohammad Siddiq Farhang (Head of Planning, Ministry of Mines and Industries); Mohammad Musa Shafiq (Director of the Law Department, Ministry of Justice); Dr Abdul Samad Hamid (Head of Secondary Education, Ministry of Education); Hamidullah (Professor of Law and Political Science, Kabul University and son of the veteran politician, now Minister of the Royal Court, Ali Ahmad Khan); and Dr Mir Najmuddin Ansari (Advisor to the Ministry of Education). Thus, the committee was dominated by people who either detested Daoud or were indifferent to him, but professed loyalty to the King for reasons of personal power ambitions and political aspirations. During its first meeting, on 31 March 1963, the committee assigned Shafiq, Hamid, Hamidullah and Farhang to research and draw up the new basic law of the country. Assisted by a French expert, M. Louis Fougère (who had had past experience with constitutional reform in Morocco), they authored the first draft of the Constitution, which was approved by the full committee in February 1964.

The draft was by no means finalised independently of the King. While it may have been an exaggeration to call Zahir Shah 'chief innovator of the 1964 constitution',⁵³ there is little doubt that the committee members, although not immediately controlled by the royal family, were sensitive to the monarch's views and preferences.⁵⁴ In order to put the draft Constitution to a wider test, and secure public legitimacy for it, Zahir Shah convened the Constitutional Advisory Commission (CAC), which worked between 1 March and 1 May 1964, to be followed by a *Loya Jirgah*. The 29-strong CAC, which claimed to represent different Afghan social strata and ethnic groups, was carefully hand-picked by the King in such a way as to give both liberal and conservative opinions utterance, without risking substantial changes to the draft. Dr Abdul Zahir, President of the National Assembly, Zahir Shah's personal physician and confidant, and later Prime Minister (1971–1972), chaired the CAC. In addition to a handful of intellectuals and religious

scholars, the Commission included several collateral members of the royal clan, including Noor Ahmad Etemadi, a Mohammadzai protégé of Mohammad Naim, then Director-General of Political Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, and subsequently Prime Minister (1967–1971).

The commission's deliberations on one constitutional issue proved less harmonious than might have been expected. It was the controversial question of the royal family's future participation in politics. The reform advocates, ostensibly with the King's consent, argued that:

the removal of royal family members from the government benefited the monarchy by placing responsibility for policy and its implementation on the officials of the civil government. This would leave the royal house less exposed to attack and to the vicissitudes of politics.⁵⁵

Some others, most notably Noor Ahmad Etemadi, protested vehemently, sensing that this provision would be offensive to Daoud and Naim, and could become a source of conflict between them and the King.⁵⁶ At the end of the day, Zahir Shah's version prevailed: the King's supreme power was preserved, while the immediate members of the royal family were barred from the highest positions in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of power. Incorporated as Article 24 into the Constitution, it read:

The Royal House is composed of the sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters of the King and their husbands, wives, sons, and daughters; and the paternal uncles and the sons of the paternal uncles of the King... Members of the Royal House shall not participate in political parties, and shall not hold the following offices: Prime Minister or Minister; Member of Parliament; Justice of the Supreme Court.⁵⁷

The ninth *Loya Jirgah* in Afghanistan's history was convened in Kabul on 9 September 1964, in order to endorse the Constitution. Its 452 delegates (103 of them appointed by the King) 'appeared to represent the full range of social, political, and religious opinion'⁵⁸ and treated their duties seriously, discussing each provision of the new fundamental law with great vigour and skill. The debate generally centred on three main issues: the Constitution's compatibility with Islam; the equitable representation of diverse ethnic interests; and the role of the Royal House in politics. Although at times the exchange of opinions was quite heated, since the *Loya Jirgah* had historically functioned not as a decision-making but as a legitimising body, the *Jirgah's* work went smoothly for ten days. The delegates approved the essential framework of the draft Constitution, albeit with some additions.

In the finalised document, Article 2 read: 'Islam is the sacred religion of

Afghanistan. Religious rites performed by the state shall be according to the provisions of the *Hanafi* doctrine [sic].’ Otherwise, in comparison with the 1931 Constitution, which contained numerous substantive references to Islam, the new codex was ‘a frankly secular document because of Article 69, that establishes the supremacy of secular law over religious law, and Article 102, that establishes the supremacy of secular over religious courts’.⁵⁹ Most importantly, deviation from the canonical Islamic doctrine that sovereignty belongs to Allah was evident: Article 1 identified the locus of sovereignty in the nation as ‘composed of all those individuals who possess the citizenship of the State of Afghanistan in accordance with the provisions of the law’, and Article 6 proclaimed that the King personified sovereignty in Afghanistan. Thus, the new Constitution failed to support the concept of Islamic *‘umma*, but subscribed to the modern notion of a nation-state.⁶⁰ By and large, the religious leaders who took part in the *Loya Jirgah* did not seriously challenge the government’s position. According to Asta Olesen, the roots of this situation can be found ‘firstly, in former Prime Minister Daoud’s harsh treatment of the religious opposition and, secondly, because of the well-qualified, religious-trained but liberal-minded members of the constitutional Committee.’⁶¹ On a more general level, the increased capacity of the state to exert social control must have induced religious and other traditionalist elements to compromise with the central authorities and to seek representation of their interests through institutionalised procedures, rather than by directly confronting the modernising government, as had been the case in 1928–1929.

Article 3, which identified Pashtu and Dari (a dialect of Persian) as Afghanistan’s two official languages, raised objections from Uzbeks, Hazaras, Baluchis and representatives of other ethnic minorities. The edited version, which read ‘From amongst the languages of Afghanistan, Pashtu and Dari shall be the official languages’, was acceptable to them only because it implicitly recognised the existence of other languages.⁶² Encouragement of the use of Pashtu, a consistent policy of all Musahiban rulers since the early 1930s, was reflected in Article 35, which obliged the state to carry out a special programme to develop and strengthen Pashtu as the ‘national’ language.⁶³ In the mid 1960s, feverish attempts were made to hammer out a literary Pashtu based on its southern (Paktiya) dialect.⁶⁴ A flurry of publications in the influential journal of the Afghan Academy, *Kabul*, authored mainly by an inveterate Pashtun chauvinist Rishtin, extolled Pashtu as the language that had matured on the territory of Afghanistan long before the advent of Islam, but was subsequently suppressed by various conquerors and despots.⁶⁵ According to a Soviet author:

In the conditions of multiethnic Afghanistan, establishment of Pashtu as the official language was used as a means towards strengthening the political hegemony of the Pashtuns, which led to the exacerbation of ethnic tension. The policy of Pashtunisation... gave definite advantages first of all to Pashtuns, and then to those who had mastered the language.⁶⁶

By the mid 1970s, Pashtuns occupied up to 70 per cent of top and middle-level positions in Afghanistan's civil and military hierarchies.⁶⁷

Article 24, contrary to many expectations, was passed with relative ease. Since its main purpose was to neutralise Daoud and Naim, all factions – the royal party, the liberal modernisers, and the traditionalists – reached a consensus on this issue. Only ten members opposed the prohibition of royal family membership in a political party.⁶⁸ When, on 19 September 1964, the *Loya Jirgah* ended its deliberations and the delegates individually endorsed the draft, Noor Ahmad Etemadi added next to his signature that he accepted all its provisions, except Article 24.⁶⁹ The King initialled the final instrument on 1 October 1964, and Afghanistan acquired a new constitution.

Thus, Zahir Shah and his advisors delivered to the nation a new legal-rational framework, within which Afghanistan would be steered towards some kind of democratic polity. It was touted as 'possibly the finest Constitution in the Muslim world',⁷⁰ and led observers in the West to declare that:

Afghanistan may offer... an example of a peaceful transition. There the western-educated 'new men' were invited into responsible government positions and encouraged to use their energies peacefully to create a new political synthesis. Under royal patronage and within the framework of the existing political structure, the modernisers are carrying forward tasks of what has been called 'nation building' with what appears to be a satisfactory level of participation in responsibility.⁷¹

The new Constitution borrowed many ideas from French, British and American legal documents, particularly in what concerned the individual rights of citizens.⁷² Yet it was fraught with potential authoritarian strains. Article 1 proclaimed Afghanistan 'a constitutional monarchy, independent, unitary and indivisible state', but in reality the King had more powers than any other head of a constitutional monarchy could dream of enjoying. He stood above any institution of government, acted as supreme commander of the armed forces, and had the right to declare war, conclude peace, and enter treaties at his discretion. He was also entitled to summon the *Loya Jirgah*, dissolve Parliament and appoint the prime minister, the chief justice and judges of the Supreme Court and half the members of the upper chamber of Parliament at will (Article 9). Article 15 added that 'The King is not

accountable to anyone and shall be respected by all.’ Article 113 empowered him to declare a state of emergency for a period of up to three months. Although Article 14 imposed formal restraints on the royal powers, to be exercised ‘within the limits prescribed by the provisions of this constitution’, in real life the monarch had a free hand in controlling the government, which was clearly divided into three branches.

The new legislative body, the *Shura* (Parliament), consisted of the *Wolosi Jirgah* (House of the People) and the *Meshrano Jirgah* (House of the Elders). Whereas the lower house was to be elected by the citizens of Afghanistan in a ‘free universal, secret, and direct election’ for four years (Articles 43 and 44), the *Meshrano Jirgah* was to have one third of its members appointed by the King from wise and experienced persons for five years, another third nominated by provincial *Jirgahs* for three years and the rest elected by popular vote for four years (Article 45). The lower house was entrusted with overseeing the conduct of the executive branch; it could move a vote of no confidence in the Cabinet and set up inquiry commissions to investigate the administration’s actions (Articles 65 and 66).

The executive branch consisted of the Council of Ministers and various ministries; it was headed by the Prime Minister and functioned as the Cabinet.⁷³ The Constitution proved rather contradictory in defining the Cabinet’s jurisdiction and accountability. On the one hand, the King could appoint and dismiss all its members whenever he deemed it necessary (Article 9). On the other hand, Articles 89–93 subjected the Cabinet to approval by the *Wolosi Jirgah*, which could demand its resignation by a two-thirds majority vote. Moreover, the Prime Minister and his ministers were responsible to the lower house for actions undertaken by them while implementing the King’s decrees (Article 96). Thus, the chair of the government was wedged between the monarch and the legislature, and his/her functions were largely confined to being the go-between for those two actors.

The judiciary was made a separate branch of the state for the first time, independent of the executive, headed by a Supreme Court appointed by the King. Article 98 stipulated that no case could be adjudicated by ‘other authorities’: previously the Office of the Prime Minister, and the Ministries of Commerce, Communications and the Interior had had their own special courts.⁷⁴ Article 102 read:

The courts in the cases under their consideration shall apply the provisions of this Constitution and the laws of the state. Whenever no provision exists in this Constitution or the laws for a case under consideration, the courts shall, by following the basic principles of the *Hanafi* jurisprudence of the *Shariah* of Islam and within the limitations

set forth in this constitution, render a decision that in their opinion secures justice in the best possible way.

In Duprée's opinion:

Article 102 is the most important Article in the Constitution... Note that Article 102 enjoins the courts to consider cases in the light of the 'Constitution and the laws of the state', and mentions the *Hanafi Shariah* as a last resort. In effect, Article 102 (plus Article 69, which deals with legislation) makes Afghanistan a secular state, even while paying lip service to Islam throughout.⁷⁵

The *Loya Jirgah*, the tribal institution with no legal framing which had been convened eight times in the twentieth century prior to 1964 to resolve matters of paramount national importance, was integrated into the fabric of the national legislature in a special Title V of the Constitution. According to Article 78, it was to comprise all members of the national Parliament and leaders of the provincial *Jirgahs*. The *Loya Jirgah*, to be assembled on the King's request, was to serve as an instrument for testing popular attitudes and also as an additional means for the King to secure wider political support for his initiatives.⁷⁶

The final part of the Constitution rendered the Yusuf government transitional until the election of the first *Shura* to be held on 14 October 1965, and entrusted it with preparing new laws on elections, press, courts and political parties for the Parliament's consideration (Article 126).

However, for a document of this type to take root and prove effective and binding, it was imperative that, first of all, it enshrined the values shared by the politically active segments of the society, most of all those power and interest groups which competed with the state for influence over the populace. Second, these groups should have been prepared to accept the new rules of the game, and uphold the legal-rational authority stemming from the constitutional document, as well as to contribute constructively to the evolution of common conventions of political behaviour. Third, the public in general should have had the necessary level of political and social awareness to understand the need for the constitutional changes, and thus be prepared to trade some of their traditional rules and practices for innovations at both individual and societal level which might, or might not, lead to a better life.

The problem was that none of these imperatives was taken into account in the formulation of the new Afghan Constitution. It reflected mainly what the King and his western-educated advisors considered feasible in terms of their political needs and aspirations, rather than corresponding to the realities

of Afghanistan. In its prescriptions, the Constitution was hardly indigenous; it was based on borrowings from different western documents which were presented, with some contradictory modifications, as applicable to Afghanistan. Put to the test, they did not necessarily work as intended. For instance, the principle of legality adopted from the 1791 French Constitution and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which professed presumption of innocence and prohibition of retrospective enforcement of the penal law (Article 26), was proclaimed in Afghanistan:

at a time when statutory law had remained underdeveloped and legal practice in the country was largely governed by Shari'a law... It soon became evident that the constitutional principle of legality could not be implemented without the existence of a body of statutes to guide the legal practice and the on-going activities of the courts... Indeed, the legislative record of the four-year term of the first parliament following the 1964 Constitution 'can only be described as abysmal'.⁷⁷

Even a decade later, traditional courts based on the Hanafi *fiqh* continued to dominate Afghanistan, although in appearance they may have become statutory courts.⁷⁸

The fact that the Constitution was hastily approved by a largely hand-picked *Loya Jirgah* by no means signified that a satisfactory compromise had been achieved between Islamic, traditional and customary values on the one hand, and modern liberal codes on the other. The traditional elite, no longer able openly to challenge the centralised state, elected to defend its interests by constitutional means, through the Parliament, local elections, mass demonstrations and the press, with some success.⁷⁹ At any rate, the Constitution and the whole experiment with democracy rapidly proved of little relevance to the vast majority of the Afghan people. The best indication of this was the 1965 parliamentary election ('as fair as any... in Asia, or in some parts of Alabama, or in Cook County, Illinois'), where only roughly one out of every six eligible citizens bothered to vote.⁸⁰ During this poll and the next, in 1969, people voted according to ethnic or kinship ties and at the behest of powerful individuals, propelling the true power elite, rural 'khans, begs, boyars, maliks, and mullahs',⁸¹ to parliamentary seats in Kabul.

To whom, then, was the Constitution relevant? It is possible to identify three major groups whose interests were served by its promulgation. They were: the ruling branch of the royal family; the senior government officials, in particular those close to the King; and the politically active segments of the small urbanised intelligentsia and their 'benefactors', who thrived on the activities of these segments in one form or another. They had been brought

together by hostility to one man and his policies and thus could be dubbed ‘the anti-Daoud coalition’:

So long as its elements feared that Daoud Khan might regain power, they saw a need for unity. But by the time the Constitution had been drafted, reviewed, and ratified it appeared that Daoud Khan had withdrawn from the political system that had rejected his leadership. The elements of the coalition then began to compete for power, and to fracture internally.⁸²

The King was by far the most central figure in this coalition. Indeed, with all the powers vested in him under the new constitution, the country’s efforts to modernise and reform were ‘almost entirely dependent upon the goodwill and farsightedness of the king’.⁸³ However, Zahir Shah, who had finally tasted real power after three decades on the throne, turned out to be exceedingly preoccupied with strengthening his own leadership. Although the first *Shura* passed the Political Parties Bill according to the letter and spirit of the Constitution, he never signed it into law. In the words of an Afghan expert:

Zaher Shah was not sincere in his support of democracy. He did not realise that a little bit of democracy was dangerous like a little bit of learning. He could not believe any one around him. While there were several parties existing, he ignored them and kept the law of parties under his knee. Therefore, every party remained in its cocoon and did not experience competition, nor did they gain political awareness by working together and forming coalitions and alliances.⁸⁴

The King failed to promote national issues capable of overriding traditional divisions and petty personal interests. Nazif Shahrani has argued that, apart from Pashtun nationalism, Zahir Shah’s regime did not have *any* commonly held ideological purpose, and indulged in ‘nothing more than the public exhibition of a few hollow “democratic” procedures, such as voting, parliamentary elections, parliamentary debates, “free” press, and so forth’.⁸⁵ The general feelings of optimism so characteristic of spring 1963 had given way to tidings of discontent and pessimism amongst the educated stratum of Afghanistan, reflected in political group agitations and student demonstrations that began in October 1965 and recurred periodically until 1973.

Lacking the political will to reverse the situation, and wary as ever of Daoud’s spectre, Zahir Shah invoked his absolutist prerogatives to secure his own political survival. Since the Constitution had not barred him from appointing immediate and distant members of the royal family to secondary positions in the army and civil administration, he created personal patronage networks in these structures. In this he relied heavily on General Abdul

Wali, Daoud's bitter opponent, who did not hesitate to use troops under his command to quell dissent, even without the Prime Minister's agreement.⁸⁶ Zahir Shah made army affairs and all military dealings with the Soviet Union an exclusively royal domain, to the extent that Cabinet could not even discuss military matters during its weekly meetings, nor extract any relevant information from the Minister of Defence, who reported directly to the King. In fact, no government of the 'New Democracy' era was seriously concerned with any military issue, be it armed forces' reorganisation, equipment purchases, recruitment procedures, or the growing dependence on the Soviet Union for personnel training and weapons maintenance. By 1973, the USSR had succeeded in placing an estimated 550 advisors at all levels in the Afghan armed forces, with a substantial number of them attached to the Armoured Corps and the Air Force.⁸⁷ In the early 1970s, American diplomats reported that: 'There is... no effective organisation within the military to counter or even catalog the long-term, possibly subversive effects of Soviet training of the many military officers who go to the USSR for stints as long as six years.'⁸⁸

There existed the Afghan intelligence organisation, the Department of Record of Information under the auspices of the Office of the Prime Minister, but its reports dealt largely with disciplinary and ethical issues in the armed forces. Apparently the King had instructed its senior officers not to delve too deeply into ideological beliefs of army personnel and their Soviet mentors' activities. He falsely believed that his control over the army and air force was absolute, since he personally made every appointment to the rank of captain and above.⁸⁹

Zahir Shah worked vigorously to create ramified patronage networks of marginal members of the royal family and senior public servants who owed their offices directly to him. For example, the King's first cousins from Shah Mahmud Khan, Sultan Mahmud Ghazi and Zalmai Mahmud Ghazi, were assigned to chair the Aviation Authority and represent Afghanistan in various West European countries respectively. At the level of deputy ministers and heads of departments, the government was dominated by Zahir Shah's associates, who by virtue of their royal backing wielded more power than their superiors. Shafiq and Hamid, the constitutional advisors, were amongst the most important of them.⁹⁰

Zahir Shah acted as patron for all four prime ministers during the whole period of the experiment with democracy: Mohammad Hashim Maiwandwal (November 1965–October 1967), Noor Ahmad Etemadi (November 1967–December 1969, December 1969–May 1971), Dr Abdul Zahir (July 1971–November 1972) and Mohammad Musa Shafiq (December 1972–July 1973). Rather than selecting the head of the Cabinet from amongst influential

members of *Wolosi Jirgah*, the King preferred to appoint old cronies, whose political fortunes depended not so much on the efficiency of the government's performance, but more on the behind-the-scenes deals that Zahir Shah cut with leaders inside and outside the parliament.⁹¹ He had always privately promised the position of Prime Minister to his favourites well ahead of time, by intimating to them that one day they would be appointed the head of the government. This, indeed, made a mockery of the constitutional process.

In short, the Constitution helped the King to seek modern legitimacy for his traditional leadership, and also regulated the relationship between him and the royal family, muting any challenge which had historically come from his own royal rivals – in the present situation from Daoud. However, Daoud was not a man to sit idle indefinitely. When it became clear that Zahir Shah was not inclined to implement the reforms that Daoud had suggested, Daoud had no reason to keep his end of the bargain. As Hasan Kakar has observed:

Da'ud, in whose blood politics had mixed... was waiting for the right moment to strike... Da'ud was free to call on friends. He received visitors in Cheltan, his suburban estate... He was personally supervising construction of the hospital which was to be contributed to the government upon completion. It is generally assumed that he met there with his 'friends' or with the emissaries disguised as masons or workers.⁹²

Daoud set out to use the constitutional process to create a political environment that would allow him to regain power. He had many sincere supporters, as well as opportunists both inside and outside government agencies, to help him in his endeavour.

Daoud's Intrigues

In the administration, some former ministers of the Daoud regime, such as Dr Ali Ahmad Popal and Abdullah Malikyar, who served in Yusuf's Cabinet, maintained close informal ties with Daoud. However, it was Abdul Razaq Ziayee, a Vice-Minister in the Administrative Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who constantly encouraged Daoud's power ambitions, and around whom a potent Daoudist network coalesced.⁹³ Abdul Razaq Ziayee, a graduate of Kabul University in Law and Political Science, had been a protégé of Prime Minister Mohammad Hashim, who had put him in charge of administering part of his personal wealth in the USA, subsequently inherited by Daoud and Naim. This had enabled Ziayee to develop close ties with, and eventually great personal devotion to, the two brothers. Daoud's resignation in 1963, at which time Ziayee already held a senior administrative position at the Foreign Ministry, deeply shocked Ziayee. In private

conversations with close friends, he made disparaging remarks about Mohammad Yusuf, calling him a 'commoner, Kashmiri', as well as about Yusuf's deputy, Sayed Qassem Reshtia, regarding them both as traitors to Daoud and unworthy of their positions. Ziayee's circle of contacts encompassed many politicians and bureaucrats, including Mir Akbar Khaibar, a pro-Soviet Marxist.

In his efforts to launch a campaign for Daoud's return to power, Ziayee craftily exploited traditional inter-clan rivalries, patronage allegiances and personal grievances of government officers. In this respect, for example, his recruitment of Sayyid Wahid Abdullah and Massoud Pohanyar, both working at the Foreign Ministry, was important. Wahid Abdullah, a Mohammadzai on his mother's side, had dropped out of high school, but entertained great political ambitions. He was formerly married to Reshtia's daughter, but since the breakup of his marriage, had fallen out with Reshtia, whom he suspected of having used his influence to deny him custody of his children. On the other hand, Pohanyar's pro-Daoud leanings stemmed from Nadir Shah's discrimination against his family because of its leanings towards former King Amanullah and aversion to Nadir Shah's assumption of his throne.

Ziayee also used Mohammad Hasan Sharq, a well-educated and diligent former head of the Prime Minister's secretariat during 1953–1963. Sharq harboured deep resentment towards the King's branch of the Musahiban family, because his father, Mir Sayyid Qasem, Minister of Education in the early 1930s, had been imprisoned for many years on suspicion of having had a hand in King Nadir Shah's assassination. Sharq considered that his father had been made a scapegoat, and much misery thereby inflicted upon his family.

Ziayee, Abdullah and Pohanyar formed the core of what can be termed a Daoudist solidarity network, which launched a sub rosa propaganda campaign and started to establish links with like-minded individuals in other ministries, even before the new Constitution was ratified and the experiment with democracy had begun in earnest. Dr Yusuf, who was also acting as Foreign Minister, deemed it necessary to send Ziayee away as Minister to Tehran in mid 1964. However, he returned to Kabul in 1967 to become Director-General of Administrative Services. By that time a new government was in power, with Yusuf replaced by his Minister of Information and Culture, Mohammad Hashim Maiwandwal, on 2 November 1965. Maiwandwal and his successor, Noor Ahmad Etemadi, strove to maintain better relations with Daoud's clique, for they had become increasingly aware of Daoud's unhappiness with the constitutional process and his potential to torpedo their governments' policies. As a sop to Daoud's branch of the royal family, Etemadi included Pohanyar in his Cabinet as Minister of Tribal Affairs in his two

consecutive governments (November 1967–July 1971). Yet this appointment gave the Daoudist network direct access to all Cabinet discussions and decisions. Pohanyar reported to Ziaee on every weekly Cabinet meeting, and Ziaee unfailingly passed this information to Daoud.

The Daoudist circle in the executive branch was supplemented by a group of deputies in the first and second *Shuras*. Small in numbers, but highly active and vocal, Daoud's protégés and admirers, such as Ishaq Osman and Azizullah Wasifi quickly organised a Daoudist parliamentary core to pressure the executive through the *Wolosi Jirgah*. Quietly guided by Daoud, this core unleashed a campaign to make life extremely difficult for the constitutional governments. The lack of regular political parties, and absenteeism in the national legislature:

encouraged an active minority of *wakils* [deputies] in the twelfth Parliament [1965–1969] (about 50 out of 216) to control (perhaps stultify would be a better word) government activity in all branches by launching a series of investigations of government activities by various committees of the House.⁹⁴

The Daoudists colluded with a variety of anti-monarchy groups, most of all the leftist pro-Moscow elements, led by Babrak Karmal,⁹⁵ whose identity and role in Afghan politics will be discussed shortly. Beginning in 1966, Daoud regularly but secretly conferred with Babrak and his comrades, trying to elaborate a strategy for a new regime; young military officers loyal to Daoud also took part in those discussions, which were attended by some 50 people at various times.⁹⁶ Successive constitutional governments knew of Daoud's clandestine activities, but preferred not to interfere, for three reasons. First, they did not believe that Daoud would do anything to undermine Mohammadzai dynastic rule. Second, they underestimated Daoud's power and influence after several years of retirement, and overestimated the strength of the new constitutional framework of political competition, and third, they regarded Daoud's activities as an issue better left to the King.

The Malfunctioning of the Executive

In the meantime, the alliance between the royal court and reformist and traditionalist elements was rapidly proving temporary and opportunistic. The case of the King and his family has already been discussed: they ultimately refused to be moved from the apex of the ruling hierarchy to share power with reformist technocrats and/or traditional strongmen. Educated liberals who had been so enthusiastic about the prospects of building democracy in Afghanistan were tamed:

Prime ministers and ministers known for their dynamism and determination to push the country along the road to parliamentary democracy were soon frustrated, owing partly to the lack of royal support, the only basis of their power... the king's style of rule remained basically the same: to seek advice from a few closest to him and to give instructions to his ministers, treating them as individual officials rather than as members of a collective team. Except for a few Cabinet members who were bold enough to initiate policies of their own in their departments, the bulk of the Ministers looked for implicit or explicit royal instructions. On the whole, the executives of the constitutional period functioned dependently, being closely associated with the monarch.⁹⁷

The King's failure to sign into law the Political Parties Bill proved a fatal mistake. On the one hand, the already informally existing, mainly leftist, political organisations could not be silenced. On the other hand, the failure denied the executive vital partisan support and dramatically weakened the government, making it a hostage to the monarch's goodwill and the *Shura's* politicking. Thus, relations with the King rather than seniority in Cabinet determined how much power prime ministers and ministers wielded. It became routine for individual ministers to go to great lengths to outdo not only one another, but also the Prime Minister in pursuit of their ambitions. Two such ministers in the Yusuf Cabinet were Sayed Qassem Reshtia and Mohammad Hashim Maiwandwal.

Reshtia's well-known opposition to Daoud had endeared him to the King, who deliberately selected him to work on the new constitution. While in Yusuf's government, Reshtia worked diligently to set up a patronage network of his own, with a view to replacing Yusuf. He also tried to strengthen his position in the parliament by helping his brother and sister to be elected to the first constitutional *Wolosi Jirgah*. Maiwandwal, on the other hand, was at loggerheads with both Yusuf and Reshtia. A self-educated man, son of a preacher originally from Bukhara, Maiwandwal replaced Reshtia as Minister of Information and Culture in December 1964, having previously served as Ambassador in Washington, President of the Department of Press and Information in Daoud's Cabinet between 1955 and 1956 and Press Advisor to the King. While initially regarded as a protégé of Mohammad Naim, and having played no part in creating the new constitution, Maiwandwal's loyalty, political skills and especially his great eloquence had earned him the King's favour. Dr Yusuf tendered his resignation on 29 October 1965, following large-scale student demonstrations in Kabul, instigated by Karmal and other leftist politicians. On 4 November Maiwandwal, newly appointed as Prime Minister, staged a dramatic appearance at Kabul University, where he made

a brilliant speech promising to consider the students' demands in due course.⁹⁸ Maiwandwal's premiership, from November 1965 to October 1967, was marked by attempts to set up an efficient executive and make the constitutional process irreversible.

Despite the Political Parties Bill remaining unratified, Maiwandwal informally set up a political organisation behind his government in August 1966. Called *Democrat-i Mutaraqi* (Progressive Democracy – PD),⁹⁹ it set out to 'create a free and progressive society on the basis of national unity... the predominance of law, equality and social assistance'.¹⁰⁰ Calling for a 'Quiet Revolution', Maiwandwal mapped out a strategy that was potentially attractive to a broad stratum of political forces:

Islam is the backbone of our outlook, constitutional monarchy guarantees our national sovereignty, democracy is our path of development, nationalism is the reflection of the country's historical face, our goal is socialism, ie building a flourishing society living by common interests.¹⁰¹

Multi-party parliamentarism, a mixed economy, an anti-corruption drive and strict neutrality in foreign affairs were the hallmarks of the PD programme, which drew a number of politicians across the political spectrum to Maiwandwal, including poet Abdur Rauf Benawa, one of the founders of the *Wikh-i Zalmayan*; Abdul Hai Habibi, a well-known Pashtun historian; Mohammad Siddiq Tarzi (Mahmoud Tarzi's cousin); moderate Marxist Fazl Rahim Mohmand;¹⁰² and Pashtun nationalist Professor Abdul Shakur Rashad. To reassure the Soviets and Afghan leftists that his ambassadorship in Washington had not led him to anti-Soviet leanings, Maiwandwal even appointed Ehsan Taraki, a 'part-time Marxist', as Minister of Justice.

Zahir Shah, however, soon became alarmed by the PD's growing influence and popularity. He resorted to his usual technique to get rid of Maiwandwal, by beginning to encourage the ambitions of individual Cabinet members, particularly Maiwandwal's First Deputy and Foreign Minister, Noor Ahmad Etemadi. After Maiwandwal resigned because of ill health, Zahir Shah did everything possible to expunge him from the political landscape. The PD's newspaper, *Mosamat*, was periodically suspended, its supporters were placed under constant police surveillance, and Maiwandwal's attempt to run for parliament in 1969 was frustrated.¹⁰³

The same pattern recurred throughout the constitutional period: the monarch devised methods to keep premiers in check. Etemadi soon not only became an object of palace intrigues, but also was constantly harassed by scathing criticisms in the Afghan press, abetted by the King,¹⁰⁴ and this finally prompted him to resign. In the Cabinet of his successor, Dr Abdul Zahir,

the Foreign Minister and King's favourite advisor, Musa Shafiq, stirred up much trouble in pursuit of the premiership, promised to him by the monarch. All this caused internecine fighting, dissension and back-stabbing within successive governments, resulting in precipitous erosion of government power, emasculation of the office of Prime Minister, and inability of the executive branch to act collegially and effectively.

In the meantime, the legislative branch, *Wolosi Jirgah*, malfunctioned. In the absence of political parties and provincial election laws, the parliament was dominated by *Wakils* who had no institutional commitment but retained strong tribal/parochial loyalties, were not qualified to make judgments on issues of national importance, and in most cases were mainly preoccupied in reaping as many material benefits as possible from their positions as intermediaries between the centre and the periphery.¹⁰⁵ *Wakils* of the second *Wolosi Jirgah*, elected in October 1969, had inherited 31 items of unfinished legislation, including normal and development budgets, laws on taxation, banking and government disputes, and judiciary statutes; a year later, they all still awaited a vote, and were topped by a backlog of pressing new issues.¹⁰⁶ In order to get approval for its activities, the executive was forced 'to settle for fickle ad-hoc legislative alliances', bribing or otherwise persuading individual deputies.¹⁰⁷

Afghanistan had finally been given a political system that was a parody of Westminster democracy: the doctrine of separation of powers was pushed beyond the limits acceptable in a traditional society, where the executive's predominance had been a given for centuries. Creation of a potent legislature and an independent judiciary was not accompanied by establishment of a working mechanism to ensure proper coordination amongst all branches of power. The only force that could make the state machine work at all was the monarch. However, although he ushered in the era of constitutionalism, he proved incapable of following its course unswervingly. Apart from putting the Political Parties Bill on hold, Zahir Shah also refused to sign the vital Municipal Councils Act and Provincial Councils Bill, thus missing a chance to create an institutional infrastructure that might have provided for the polity's greater stability. This lack of courage (or vision) stemmed from the Mohammadzai dynasty's politics of survival, which took precedence over the nation's interests, as well as from Zahir Shah's personal traits.¹⁰⁸

The 'New Democracy' was also undermined by deteriorating economic conditions. Afghanistan continued to depend heavily on foreign aid to implement its development programmes. Yet after 1964, for a variety of reasons, financial and commodity assistance from abroad decreased dramatically. Foreign project aid obtained for the second Five-Year Plan (1962–1967) was

only 58.9 per cent of the planned level, and dropped even further, to 49.1 per cent of the planned level during the third Five-Year Plan (1967–1972) despite its more modest scope.¹⁰⁹ The US government was especially severe, cutting support to Kabul more than ten-fold in the decade to 1972, when it reached a nadir of US\$2.35 million.¹¹⁰ As a result, the Soviet Union strengthened its economic position in Afghanistan substantially: in 1973 its realised financial commitments were more than three times those of America.¹¹¹ With the benefit of hindsight, Leon Poullada commented bitterly that:

It was in America's security interest... to support and encourage the democratic political development in Afghanistan – but again American diplomacy failed to rise to the occasion. A measure of this failure is the fact that *in every year of the democratic experiment, American economic aid declined*. No special effort was made to give strong visible support to the several prime ministers between 1963 and 1973.¹¹²

Afghan cabinets tried to expand domestic sources of revenue, but all their attempts were frustrated by the traditionalist parliament. The *Wakils* objected ferociously to any increases in land and livestock taxes, forcing the government to rely on indirect taxes and other inflationary means of fulfilling the budget.¹¹³ One of the consequences of shrinking foreign aid and growing financial difficulties was that the state found it increasingly difficult to accommodate the swelling numbers of college-leavers:

By the early 1970s unemployment among university graduates was becoming visible. Even for those successful in finding work, a career in government service was likely to add to the frustration of those without the right family connections... Salaries were low, providing ample incentive for corruption. Under 'New Democracy' rising inflation further reduced the real wages of government employees, and while their numbers increased dramatically, there was no corresponding investment in offices and other facilities, so working conditions also deteriorated markedly.¹¹⁴

Discontent amongst students and the lower echelons of the bureaucracy created excellent recruiting opportunities for nascent political groups espousing various ideologies, of which the communists were arguably the most active and successful.¹¹⁵

The Soviet Reaction

Meanwhile, the post-Khrushchev Soviet leadership had reasons to become concerned about the Afghan developments. Although its overall approach gave the appearance of tolerating the changes in Afghanistan, it could not

afford to underestimate the risk of the changes re-orientating Afghanistan away from the Soviet Union, thereby undermining the USSR's sizable economic and military investment in Afghanistan since the mid 1950s, and broader Soviet interests in the region. One way to overcome the risk was to exploit the changes in the Soviet Union's favour. This came at a time when official modification in Soviet ideological behaviour towards the Third World was underway, prompted by realisation that thus far, military and economic aid on its own had failed as an instrument for diverting a Third World country like Afghanistan onto a non-capitalist or socialist path of development in alliance with the Soviet Union. From the mid 1960s, the Soviet leadership postulated that economic and military aid should be accompanied by an effort to help the development of an indigenous pro-Soviet communist party in the recipient country.

As the Afghan pro-democracy changes accelerated, they provided ample grounds for the Soviets to encourage the growth of such a party. The process of change opened the way for the Afghan intelligentsia to assume a greater role in politics. Small and mostly Kabul-based, but nonetheless expanding more than ever before, the intelligentsia was mainly composed of secularist, semi-secularist and religious intellectuals, professionals, bureaucrats, technocrats and military officers. While largely employed in the public sector, different segments of it immediately took advantage from 1964 of the new constitutional rights and freedoms to engage in informal group politics within and outside the legislative arenas. Within two years of the promulgation of the Constitution, diverse groups, ranging in their ideological-political disposition from liberal and social democrat to irredentist nationalist to Islamist, leftist and ultra-leftist, emerged on the political scene, either in opposition to the government or in response to one another. Many of them revolved around certain personalities; some operated on an ad hoc basis, without much organisational structure, and some modeled themselves on political parties.

Most of them published individual weekly or bi-weekly papers, serving as their unofficial organs, found a voice in the *Wolosi Jirgah* and also sought active support in higher and tertiary educational institutions, particularly Kabul University. Given the lack of a Political Parties Law, neither the King nor any Prime Minister apart from Maiwandwal, as mentioned earlier, made any serious attempt at forming a ruling party; but they all endeavoured in one form or another to manipulate the informal groups for the purpose of a parliamentary majority, political expediency and popular legitimacy.

A full discussion of all the diverse groups falls outside the scope of this study, but it is important for our purpose to focus briefly on the ones which

were either used as the main instruments of Soviet policy objectives or emerged in opposition to Soviet communism. They included two leftist groups, which, by 1966–1967, had become known as *Parcham* ('Banner') and *Khalq* ('Masses'); one pragmatic/opportunistic network, which informally operated as the 'Daoudist solidarity network'; and several secularist and Islamist groupings.

Communists versus Islamists

Parcham was grounded in a pro-Soviet cell of Kabul activists, which evolved around Babrak Karmal. The latter came from a Dari-speaking mother, and an urbanised, well-off Durrani Pashtun father, who rose to the rank of Army General under Daoud, and whose family had become utterly dissociated from their nomadic brethren by being landowners for some five generations. Karmal was brought up and received all his education (including a degree in Political Science and Law from Kabul University) in Kabul's Dari-speaking urban environment, and moved generally in the fashionable intellectual circles of the capital. He had become so urbanised that he could hardly relate to his Pashtun background or speak the Pashtu language. As a leader of the Students' Union at Kabul University during Prime Minister Shah Mahmud's political reprisals, in 1952, Karmal, together with a fellow student and one of the founders of the *Nida-ye Khalq* party (the Voice of the Masses), had received a four-year sentence and 'gained first knowledge of the ideas of scientific socialism in jail'.¹¹⁶ However, while at the university, he had also been brought to Daoud's attention through Ishaq Osman and Hasan Sharq (who was subsequently appointed Deputy Prime Minister during Daoud's presidency, and later assumed senior positions in the Soviet-installed *Parcham* government in the 1980s). Daoud quietly encouraged Karmal in his 'reformist' activities as a means to advance his own power rivalry with his uncle, Shah Mahmud. When Daoud became Prime Minister in 1953, the conditions of Karmal's imprisonment were eased, leading to his release in 1956. Although restrained from doing anything openly against Daoud, in the atmosphere of growing Afghan-Soviet friendship Karmal developed an increasing commitment to Marxism-Leninism and ideological allegiance to the Soviet Union, and began an underground process of organising a pro-Soviet group. He was generally regarded as an element of the 'Establishment, representing the modishly far left wing of the wealthiest and most powerful Afghan families'.¹¹⁷ He developed regular contacts with the Soviet Embassy, and was a frequent and intimate participant in Soviet cultural functions. In fact, the KGB 'curators' preferred to work with 'more liberal, pliant, and less prone to leftist deviations; Babrak and his followers'.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, *Khalq* emerged from an essentially rural-based cell of leftist Pashtunist activists, revolving around Nur Mohammad Taraki. A self-educated romantic revolutionary, Taraki was born into a humble Ghilzai Pashtun family, whose tribe had permanently lost power, as explained in Chapter 1, to the rival Durrani's Mohammedzai clan since the mid nineteenth century. His leftist leanings largely stemmed from strong feelings about the impoverished and divided existence of rural Pashtuns and the ruling Mohammedzai family's inability or unwillingness to alleviate their conditions. In the late 1940s he had been absorbed into a pro-Daoud circle in Kandahar, and rose from obscurity through patronage by well-known Pashtunist entrepreneur, and originally an associate of Daoud, Abdul Majid Zabuli, himself of Taraki's tribe. Zabuli employed Taraki in 1949 in one of his export-import companies in Bombay before helping him secure a government position when Zabuli was Minister of National Economy. It was also during this period that Daoud's circle played an important role in the emergence of *Wikh-i Zalmayan* (as discussed in Chapter 4), which demanded accelerated political reforms from Shah Mahmud's government, but was exploited by Daoud to support his political ambitions.

In the early 1950s, Taraki moved to the Press Department, from where he was sent to Washington as a press attaché. But shortly after Daoud's rise to the premiership, and his crackdown on all forms of opposition, Taraki denounced the Nadiri dynasty's rule and returned home. Another influential Pashtun nationalist, Gholam Hasam Safi, interceded for him with Daoud, and Taraki was not arrested for anti-Mohammadzai propaganda. He continued to work as an interpreter and petty bureaucrat, including a stint with the American Embassy in Kabul, and also opened the Nur Translation Bureau, which he used as a cover for political activities. In the climate of Daoud's heightening Pashtunism and warm relations with the Soviet Union, Taraki's concern for Pashtuns increasingly led him to drift towards Marxism. Commencing in 1956, Taraki, together with Karmal and Shayan, started regular underground debating sessions for students, civil servants and army officers:

The discussions at these meetings... Provided the first unmistakable evidence of Soviet-style Marxist rhetoric at work on the Afghan body politic. Nevertheless, the thrust of the discussions was not directed against Daoud's dictatorial government... Quite the reverse, the discussions supported Daoud's policies (as well, of course, as all things Soviet).¹¹⁹

He forged contacts with some Soviet-trained Pashtuns and the Soviet Embassy. By 1964, Taraki 'had become a contact man for the Soviet Embassy,

using the tea shops where he liked to sit and talk as a place to introduce young staffers who were presumed to be members of... the KGB'.¹²⁰

Following Daoud's resignation and the advent of the experiment with democracy, both Taraki and Karmal, prodded by the Soviet Embassy, stepped up their organisational activities to establish a political party. Taraki's position received an extra boost at this time from another, better-educated, fellow Ghilzai Pashtunist, Hafizullah Amin, who joined him in a common Pashtunist-Marxist cause. Amin was one of those who had benefited from Daoud's pro-Pashtunist policies, including expansion of education for Pashtuns. He had assumed secondary school teaching positions in the late 1950s, becoming a protégé of Daoud's Education Minister, Ali Ahmad Popal. He subsequently won a scholarship to study at Columbia University (1962–1965) for a Master's degree in education, where he conflated his Pashtunist and Marxist beliefs; and upon his return to Afghanistan, he came to Taraki's aid to construct a Marxist-Leninist Party. On 1 January 1965, Karmal and Taraki convened the first underground congress of the *Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq-i Afghanistan* (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, PDPA). Taraki was elected General Secretary of the PDPA Central Committee, and Karmal became his deputy. Embracing only a few hundred members, mostly teachers and students based in Kabul, the PDPA put forth a programme which was:

an orthodox Communist one for the period, reflecting the analyses of the Third World conventionally associated with Khrushchev or Brezhnev... It called for an alliance of workers, peasants, progressive intellectuals, artisans, urban and rural smallholders and national bourgeois in one front, and for the unity of the working class of Afghanistan in the face of all tribal and ethnic differences.¹²¹

The PDPA was modelled very much on the late nineteenth century Russian Social Democratic Party, but decided to operate, given the existing circumstances, with a nationalist mask. Its aim was to work through the new 'bourgeois democratic' structure to cause the monarchy's eventual downfall. Yet the Afghan communists soon proved incapable of maintaining unity even within their meager ranks. The 27 delegates to the First Congress elected seven full members and four candidate members of the Central Committee; the next day one of those not elected quit the party in a huff.¹²²

In late 1965, Taraki, Karmal and several of their supporters ran for election to the *Wolosi Jirgah*, with ample funds from unknown sources to finance their campaign. However, while Taraki failed, Karmal and a few of his supporters (most of all Anahita Ratebzad, who was reputedly Karmal's

mistress – a matter of discredit for both of them in a traditional Muslim society) succeeded. This caused much disquiet among those party faithful who attributed Karmal's and his supporters' election to Karmal's links with the royal family, especially Daoud. Moreover, it soon became apparent that Karmal and Amin could not see eye to eye: Amin detested Karmal as an instrument of the 'ruling clan' and saw himself as better educated, a better Marxist-Leninist, and more of a Pashtun.

Soon personality and ideological differences, rooted mainly in the cleavage between Pashtu and Dari speakers, and the urban-rural dichotomy, resurfaced between the two sides. Despite frantic efforts by the Soviet Embassy, in 1967 the PDPA split into *Parcham* under Karmal and *Khalq*, led by Taraki and Amin. *Khalq's* weekly, of the same name, was closed down by the government because of its attacks on religion and the monarchy, but *Parcham* was allowed to begin a weekly under its own name in March 1968. Except for a couple of hiccups, *Parcham's* publication continued uninterrupted, although its content differed little from that of the banned *Khalq* – something again attributed to Daoud's patronage and protection. Although *Khalq* contested the election in 1969, and Amin this time secured a seat in the *Wolosi Jirgah*, *Khalq* portrayed itself as more revolutionary, along the lines of the Bolsheviks, and by implication presented the *Parchamis* as Afghan Mensheviks. In the *Wolosi Jirgah*, Amin quickly allied himself with a number of Pashtun deputies. *Parcham* and *Khalq* engaged in an intense war of words against one another inside and outside the legislative arena. On the recruitment front, the *Parchamis* concentrated mainly on the Dari-speaking intelligentsia, and sought to indoctrinate high school and university students. One of their prominent activists by the late 1960s was Najibullah, a medical student at Kabul University, who subsequently became head of the PDPA government's notorious secret police, KHAD (1980–86), then PDPA leader and President from May 1986 to April 1992. On the *Khalq* front, Amin increasingly focused on the Pashtun-speaking intelligentsia and on liaising between various political groups inside and outside the government, with a clear aim of gaining influence among Pashtun military officers, who traditionally dominated the armed forces.

The Soviets from the start had serious reservations about *Khalq*. They could find little comfort in either its rural-oriented ideological vulgarism or its Pashtunist nationalism, and did not regard it as trustworthy. By contrast, they perceived greater cohesion, loyalty and at the same time ideological flexibility and pragmatism in *Parcham*. They appreciated its leadership's intellectual strength, political sophistication and, above all, links with Daoud, an old friend of the Soviet Union. Still, since both *Parcham* and *Khalq* factions

were claiming pro-Soviet loyalty, the Soviets found it for the time being politically expedient to support both separately, but without relinquishing pressure for their amalgamation.¹²³

It is imperative not to overestimate the extent of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan's domestic politics in this period: the Kremlin had a good relationship with the King, and did not want to jeopardise it. When Taraki went to Moscow in 1965 to attend an international writers' conference, he was received only by a minor official in the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee, who in plain words explained to him, the top Afghan communist, that 'Afghanistan is not ready for a socialist revolution.'¹²⁴ Moreover, the PDPA 'unlike other "brotherly parties" never received invitations to send an official delegation to a CPSU congress in Moscow. Without doubt, this was done in order to maintain good ties with the regimes of Zahir Shah and Mohammad Daoud.'¹²⁵ It appears that the Kremlin viewed Afghan communists as a sort of 'fifth column', which could be activated at an appropriate moment and which, even in a state of disarray, would serve as a reminder to the authorities in Kabul not to drift towards the West. Zahir Shah understood the message very well.¹²⁶

However, Afghanistan's democratic experiment, in conjunction with the growth of pro-Soviet groups in its wake, produced a number of unintended results. As successive liberal-minded governments pressed on with the democratic course, they found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, they had to cater to the needs of a monarchy that did not want to relinquish much of its power, the implication of this being a perennial crisis of self-confidence and loss of direction experienced by Cabinet members. On the other hand, parallel to the growing activities of the *Parchamis* and *Khalqis* and rising Soviet influence, various other ideological groups started to figure more prominently on the political scene. The main opposition to the rise of communism stemmed from non-pro-Soviet leftist and Islamist groups, and here the situation was quite different: 'While the government did not support the [pro-Soviet] Communists, at least not publicly, it began to [marginalise the non-pro-Soviet leftist groups] and brutally suppress the Muslim Youth movement, killing and imprisoning many of its leaders.'¹²⁷

Opposition to Soviet Communism

Of these groups, the most active by the turn of the 1970s were organisations that had arisen in opposition either to the Soviet brand of communism, or communism in general. On the far left of the political spectrum was the *Setam-e Melli* ('National Oppression') movement, set up in 1966 by an

original member of the PDPA's Central Committee, Taher Badakhshi.¹²⁸ Drawing mainly on support from Tajik peasants in northern Afghanistan, the Panjsher Valley in particular, as well as enjoying support from China, this group denounced the PDPA as agents of the Pashtun ruling class and professed the belief that 'armed struggle by the non-Pashtun peasantry against the Monarchy and its Soviet allies was necessary'.¹²⁹ Another Maoist faction coalesced in the beginning of 1968 around the weekly publication *Sho'la-ye Jamed* ('The Eternal Flame'), which gave this grouping its name. Rahim Mahmudi, the editor-in-chief and publisher of *Sho'la-ye Jamed*, was the nephew of Dr Abdur Rahman Mahmudi, a well-known nationalist and democrat, who was sentenced to imprisonment in 1952 and died shortly after being released in 1963. *Sho'la-ye Jamed* attacked both the Soviet Union and the US as revisionist and imperialist powers respectively; it advocated revolutionary forms of political struggle at the expense of parliamentarism, and severely criticised *Khalq* and *Parcham*. In the summer of 1968, *Sho'la-ye Jamed* organised mass demonstrations of students and workers in Kabul, which ended in violent clashes with the police. Subsequently, 14 leaders of this faction were arrested, and five of them, including Rahim Mahmudi's brother, Abdul Hadi Mahmudi, sentenced to 13 years behind bars.¹³⁰ In spite of harsh reprisals, *Sho'la-ye Jamed* remained the largest and most influential leftist group in Kabul in 1970.

Resistance to the creeping Soviet influence was also voiced by Islamist groups, which viewed Islam as a revolutionary ideology of political and social transformation, and demanded reformation of Afghanistan along Islamic lines as such. By 1965, a handful of theologians who had studied at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and had been imbued with the teachings of the *Ikhwan ul-Muslimin* ('Muslim Brotherhood'), had established informal groups to discuss Islam's role in the country and ways to save it from the threat of communism. These groups were initially confined to Kabul University, and led by Professor Ghulam Mohammad Niyazi, Dean of the Faculty of Theology. Amongst its founding members were Abdurrahim Niyazi, a number of future anti-Soviet Mujahideen leaders, such as Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Abdurrasul Sayyaf, and several other students and instructors of that faculty. In 1968, they established the Islamists' organization called *Jamiat-i Islami Afghanistan* (the Islamic Society of Afghanistan), which in the wake of the Soviet invasion emerged as the main or at least one of the main Mujahideen resistance groups under the political leadership of Burhanuddin Rabbani. A year later, they joined forces with similar groups from the Faculty of Engineering, represented by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (later Mujahideen leader of *Hizbi Islami* – Islamic Party),

Saifuddin Nasratyar, and Habib Rahman, who formed the *Nahzat-e Jawanan-e Musulman-e Afghanistan* ('Afghan Muslim Youth Movement'). The new organisation, with which the subsequent distinguished anti-Soviet and anti-Taliban Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud also reportedly interacted, held regular meetings at Burhanuddin Rabbani's house. According to one view, its activities were veiled in secrecy:

Everything was conspiratorial: the structure of the organisation, its programme, leading figures, planning and implementation of various acts... The organisation had the so-called military section, which at the initial stage was busy recruiting Army junior officers into its ranks, and later on embarked on preparing for an armed uprising. The work of the military section was coordinated by G. Hekmatyar and S. Nasratyar; the same persons were involved in organising demonstrations and meetings.¹³¹

In the early 1970s, the Islamists controlled two thirds of the seats of the Student Union at Kabul University; they were well represented in the parliament and, to a lesser extent, in the armed forces. In Kakar's view:

Because of the headway the Islamists had made, the leftist groups had gone on the defensive... The Islamic movement appeared to be on the way to becoming a party of the masses. Among other things, this threat prompted the communists to help Daoud to topple the monarchy in 1973.¹³²

Daoud's Triumph

For much of his public life Daoud had endeavoured to combat what he perceived as religious or 'black' reaction, and in the early 1970s he continued to identify the Islamist movement as a major threat to modernising Afghanistan.¹³³ During his first premiership, he did not hesitate to move against religious figures who opposed his policies, particularly over the unveiling of women. In the assessment of the Muslim Youth, 'Godless' Daoud's aims were 'elimination of the Islamic order and liquidation of the followers of the humanist school (*maktab-e ensansaz*) in Islam'.¹³⁴ Daoud also distrusted Maiwandwal's PD and the newly emergent nationalist groups, such as the ultra-nationalist Pashtun *Jamiat-e Social-e Demokratik-e Afghanistan* ('Afghan Social Democratic Party', ASDP), whose formation was announced in the *Afghan Mellat* newspaper in April 1966. Headed by Engineer Ghulam Mohammad Farhad (also known as 'Papa' in Kabul), the ASDP, among other things, advocated Pashtunistan within a Greater Afghanistan, and called for the return of Afghan territories lost to Tsarist Russia in the nineteenth century.¹³⁵ Not being formally linked to any of the

parties or ideological groups, Daoud had been watching the changing political situation closely, preserving and developing his own solidarity network within and outside the government.

Apart from senior public servants, such as Abdur Razaq Ziayee, Massoud Pohanyar and Mohammad Hasan Sharq, Daoud relied on the all-round support of influential figures in the uniformed services, such as General Ghulam Haidar Rasuli, a Mohammadzai; Qadir Nuristani, a high-ranking police officer; General Abdul Karim Mostaghni; and, apparently, General Ismael, chief of the intelligence service. Through such figures Daoud was kept fully informed of government decisions and policy initiatives. As explained before, his protégés in the *Wolosi Jirgah*, most notably Ishaq Osman, were constantly making pragmatic-opportunistic alliances with leftist factions, *Parcham* in particular, in order to undermine the government of the day. Temporarily united in disdain for the monarchical-democratic experiment, these two unlikely allies had different long-term objectives: accelerated modernisation of the country according to Daoud's vision, and establishment of a pro-Soviet regime in line with the *Parcham* programme. Successive government leaders were cognisant of *Parchami* and *Khalqi* obstructionism, as well as their links with the Soviet Union. They were also fully aware of the existence of the active Daoudist network, and the emerging ties between its members and the *Parchamis*.¹³⁶ For a number of reasons, however, they did little about these developments.¹³⁷

First, none of them ever found it credible that the pro-Soviet groups would one day be in a position to bid for power, given their minute memberships, mutual hostilities and the unsuitability of their stated policies for Afghan conditions, especially in the climate of good relations between the Afghan and Soviet leaderships. Second, they were unable to take any action to counter communist infiltration of the armed forces,¹³⁸ as all things military were overseen personally by Zahir Shah and General Abdul Wali. Consequently, prime ministers had to rely on their judgment and vigilance, which proved inadequate: by mid 1973, there may have been as many as '800 hard-core Soviet trained communist officers in the army'.¹³⁹ Third, while identifying the Daoudist solidarity network as potentially most threatening, they continually found solace in the fact that Daoud's menace stemmed from the downturn in his relationship with the King, and therefore concluded it was a matter exclusively for the monarch to handle. In his turn, Zahir Shah, whenever Daoud's suspicious behaviour was reported to him (even by General Abdul Wali), dismissed such allegations on the basis of consanguinity: Daoud would have to remain loyal to him as his brother-in-law, as well as to the dynasty on the whole, in strengthening whose rule Daoud had played so

illustrious a role. Zahir Shah even failed to take note of the fact that, from 1968, Daoud's discord with the King had reached a point where he would not allow his wife to visit her brother.

In summation, the persisting patrimonial character of the state in Afghanistan proved detrimental to an experiment with democracy. Constitutional law, freedom of speech and association, regular elections to the legislature, political parties and organisations, and other trappings of modern liberalism were superfluous under conditions where all real mechanisms of social control remained firmly in the hands of the Mohammadzai clan. The country may have acquired an imposing edifice of the 'institutional fiction of representation',¹⁴⁰ but for all practical purposes it remained close to the sultanistic ideal type of political system, that precluded the existence of moderate elements within both regime and opposition capable of negotiating a genuine democratic transition.¹⁴¹ Moreover, the entire discourse and praxis of 'democratisation' was confined to the still numerically insignificant urban establishment, so there was no pressure from the bulk of the populace to follow this path, although neither did the haphazard conduct of liberal reforms elicit mass discontent. The deteriorating economic situation, which crippled the state's regulatory function, and the radicalisation of elitist opposition groups supported and ideologically guided by the Soviet secret service also played their part in undermining the reforms. However, the major threat to stability of the regime came from the internecine fight inside the governing elite, between the King's supporters and Daoud's, emanating from the endemic royal polygamic rivalries, and the degree to which this had made Afghanistan vulnerable to outside interferences for most of its modern history. Had it not been for rivalry within the royal family, and the Soviets' growing concern about their interests in Afghanistan and the region, the Afghan experiment with democracy might not have taken the hazardous course that it did. Also, as a consequence, Afghanistan might have not have been opened to Daoud's vindictive republicanism, which within a few years led the country down the path of ideological extremism and another phase of bloody conflict in the evolution of its politics and society.