

2 State to nation: 1773–1973

Every Pashtun imagines he is Alexander the Great and wants the world to admit it. The result is a constant struggle between cousin and cousin, brother and brother and quite often between father and son. This has proved his sole undoing through the ages. They have not succeeded in being a great nation because ... [he] would rather burn his own house than see his brother rule it.

(Ghani Khan 1947)

Introduction

This chapter covers two centuries of Afghanistan's well-documented history, from the start of the reign of Timur Shah in 1773 to the end of the monarchy in 1973. My aim is not to present a detailed historical account, but to look at themes relevant to my argument, although in doing so an account of Afghan history is inevitable. Afghanistan, during its first one and a half centuries fits into the description of a segmentary state. It is only after the 1880s that it begins to turn into a 'unitary state'. Attempts in the 1960s to turn it into a modern constitutional 'nation-state' backfired, leading to the emergence of ethnic nationalists bent on secession (discussed in Chapters 7–8). Three main themes can be identified to account for two centuries of the Afghan monarchy:

- 1 The fragility of the state (especially in the first century and a half).
- 2 The attempts at modernisation after the 1880s.
- 3 The geo-political position of Afghanistan and its vulnerability to external forces.

The fragility of the Afghan state

The fragility of the state can be considered in terms of two historical periods: first, the volatile and unsettling years between the death of Ahmad Shah (1773) and Amir Abdur Rahman's coming to power in 1880;

and second, from the time of Abdur Rahman until the end of the monarchy in 1973. The latter period is also the time when different attempts were made to modernise the state.

The two centuries from 1773 to 1973 can also be characterised as follows: first, in the struggle between the Sadozai and Muhammadzai branches of the Durrani confederacy; and second, from the early 1820s (when the control of the state was transferred from the Sadozai to the Barakzai dynasty) to the end of the monarchy in 1973. During this second period three different Barakzai dynasties attempted to unite the country and to turn it into a nation-state. A major reason for this dynastic turmoil was the destabilising effect of problems connected with modernity.

Rivalry between Abdali (Durrani) confederacies

The rivalry and claim to the throne of Afghanistan by these two branches of the Abdali (the Sadozai-Popalzai and Muhammadzai-Barakzai alliances respectively) goes back to the time of Shah Abas the Great (1588–1624), when Ahmad Shah's great grandfather, Sado (nickname for Asadullah), was appointed as ambassador. Also, at the time of the 1747 *Loya Jirga*, Haji Jamal Khan withdrew his candidature in favour of Ahmad Khan (Singh 1959: 25–6). Most Muhammadzai in later years remarked of that historic *jirga*, with some justification, that in order to achieve national consensus, their great ancestor, Haji Jamal Khan conceded his and his clan's personal claim to power. Thus an unwritten alliance existed since 1747 between these two prominent Abdali (now named Durrani) clans. This alliance was nearly crippled by the murder of Payendah Khan, elder son of Haji Jamal Khan, in 1800, when he tried to replace the Sadozai ruler, Shah Zaman, who killed him for this plot. 'Afghanistan thus entered the nineteenth century a politically disunited, ethnically and religiously heterogeneous, tribal feudal state' (Tapper 1983: 14). After that, the Sadozai kings, partly owing to Muhammadzai manipulation and partly because of their own internal rivalries over the crown, went through a period of rapid turmoil (Mahmud, 1800–03; Shuja, 1803–09; Mahmud again, 1809–18). From 1818 to 1823 although the Popalzai were nominally on the throne, it was the Barakzai who were in control. But it was not until 1826 that internal differences over kingship could be sorted out amongst the Barakzai.¹ 'With the collapse of the dynasty of Ahmad Shah, Afghan nationhood came very nearly to an end . . . At this, the nadir of Afghan fortune, a new leader rose to prominence. Surprisingly enough it was Dost Mohammad, the youngest of the Barakzai brothers' (Fletcher 1965: 70, 71). The civil war between 1818 and 1835, during Dost's first term, was threatening to tear the country apart. This continued during Dost's second term (1842–63) and it was only two weeks before his death in 1863, when Herat, the last major province not yet under central control was united with the rest of the country.

The Muhammadzai in the 1820s did not always maintain ‘good relations among themselves . . . but unlike the Sadozai they [were] able to produce a succession of able rulers to keep the country together’ (Fraser-Tytler 1967: 71),² partly because the Muhammadzai and Barakzai in the three-quarters of a century of Sadozai rule had played a prominent role as generals, administrators and tribal chiefs.

The three years from 1823–26 were a transitional period from the Sadozai to Barakzai dynasty. The civil war since 1818 had been fought by claimants and counter-claimants for the throne, first between the twenty-three sons of Timur Shah, and second amongst the twenty-two Barakzai sons of Payendah Khan. The role of the Muhammadzai, after the blinding and killing of Wazir Fateh Khan, the eldest of the Barakzai brothers, ‘with a cruelty so abominable that men still writhe at the telling of it’ (Caroe 1965: 268), by Kamran the son of Mahmud Sadozai in 1818, led to an almost total breakdown of the alliance and the takeover by the Muhammadzai who had previously stood by Sadozai imperial rule. The reason why the Muhammadzai clashed so violently with the Sadozai was over Fateh Khan’s own oversight. After seizing the treasure of Herat from Firozuddin Sadozai, the governor of Herat, when he was sent to see to the likely Persian attack, Fateh Khan ‘then made an unforgivable mistake, by sending his younger brother Dost Mohammad to the harem of Firozuddin to search the women’ (Fletcher 1965: 68–9). This reproach against the Sadozai violated Pashtun honour.

For a period of eight years after 1818, the Sadozai were put on the throne but in name alone. All decisions concerning the running of the state were in the hands of the Muhammadzai. In 1826, Dost Mohammad Khan (1826–39), as the first Muhammadzai ruler, transferred the throne from the Sadozai to his own clan. His first period of rule coincided with the first Anglo-Afghan war (1839–42) when the British brought the Sadozai Shuja from his retirement in India placing him on the throne in Kabul. Dost, in 1839, and to the Afghans’ surprise, gave himself up to the British who pensioned him off to India. In the first Anglo-Afghan War when 4,500 officers and troops together with 12,000 camp followers were killed, the British decided to bring back Dost to pick up the pieces. Dost was succeeded by his third son, Sher Ali, who in his two terms of reign (1863–67 and 1869–79) was continuously chased by his father’s brothers and their sons, culminating in the second Anglo-Afghan war (1879–81). It was in the 1880s that Abdur Rahman, the ‘Iron Amir’, effectively stopped these internal squabbles over the throne.

The segmentary state

This first century and a half of fragility and internal squabbles over sovereignty is typical of a segmentary state. In the previous chapter, Ahmad Shah’s twenty-six-year rule was discussed in terms of Weber’s theory of pat-

rimony. Ralph Grillo, discussing Aiden Southall's account of segmentation in Alur society, points out that 'Southall did not, however, wish to confine application of the term to societies which had segmentary lineage systems. In his view, it was generalizable, and patrimonial states may frequently be described as "segmentary", in a slightly broader sense' (Grillo 1998: 33). The Afghan state is a typical segmentary state that does not easily lend itself to a system of centralised authority. Thus the turmoil and fragility are a reaction to central power wishing to impose rules of succession, administration and uniformity. However, it is through the mutual interest of segments, in this case tribes, clans and lineages, that alliances are frequently made and broken with those in power. So in a strong centre, like the period of Ahmad Shah, power is allowed to be concentrated at the centre, since its acceptance brings political benefits like uniting the tribes, prestige and security from outside attacks or encroachment. On economic grounds the benefits also included such issues as *wolja* (war-booties), grants of land and salaries for the duration of service and stability for trade and commerce. The chiefs, in this case the khans and the maliks under them, also benefit. The khans were given usufruct rights in land, and the maliks, in collecting taxes, benefited personally and also, by excusing some and lowering the rates for others, established their patron-client relationships. However, even when a central power or authority is accepted, it does not mean that its writ is established in the periphery. Only non-Pashtuns were expected to ask for the centre's intervention in disputes, settlements and tax matters. Pashtuns themselves preferred their traditional tribal ways of self-help and self-reliance even in raising an army. To go to the central government's courts for help would indicate weakness and thus make one vulnerable to future attacks and impingement by forces inside and outside the segment.

The system of interstate relations . . . was itself usually grounded in the same principles of patronage and clientage which governed the states internally, and was generally characterised by shifting alliances, changing allegiances, conquests, rebellions, and reconquests, in seemingly endless cycles. Consistent with this general environment, and contributing to it, was the 'segmentary' form that many of these states took.

(Grillo 1998: 32)

The transition from a segmentary to a unitary state began with the 'Iron Amir', Abdur Rahman (1880–1901). Such a transition, according to Southall, occurs over an extended period. This extended period in the Afghan case was the 133 years between Ahmad Shah's election in 1747 and the Iron Amir's accession to the throne in 1880.

In the Afghan example the unitary state was imposed on a segmentary lineage-based tribal order that hardly worked. Only when steps were taken by a strong ruler, such as Abdur Rahman, to break the power of the tribes,

the religious and ethnic sections referred to by the amir as ‘those hundreds of petty chiefs, plunderers, robbers, and cut-throats who were the cause of everlasting trouble in Afghanistan...’, was the creation of ‘one grand community under one law and under one rule’ made possible (Munshi vol. ii, 1900: 175ff.). The segmentary state that Abdur Rahman attempted to replace, was one where ‘specialised political power [was] exercised within a pyramidal series of segments tied together at any one level by the oppositions between them at a higher level’ (Southall 1956: 260).

Attempts at modernisation

Amir Abdur Rahman: the second Anglo-Afghan War (1879–81)

The defeat of the British army at Maiwand near Kandahar in 1879 was a devastating blow to the prestige of the British military. Some 1,130 soldiers lost their lives and all their heavy artillery fell into the hands of the Afghans. Subsequently, British forces occupied Kabul and Kandahar after the legendary twenty-three days’ march of General Roberts. However, the defeat of the conqueror of Maiwand (Yaqob Khan) by Roberts left Afghanistan without an amir or leader. As so often in such cases, a religious leader, this time a Mullah Din Muhammad, known as Mullah Mushk Alam, the Fragrance of the Universe, and a tribal leader, Muhammad Jan Khan Wardag, appeared and mounted attacks on the British forces in Kabul. The British, having yet again suffered heavily, wanted to hand over the country to someone and leave. At this time, Abdur Rahman, who had spent twelve years in exile in Russia and had been given 200 fighting men by the Russians, crossed the Amu River, and joined with other Afghan forces in the north, preparing for an attack on Kabul. The Russians, having kept him for so long, naturally wanted their man in power. But as Abdur Rahman later conveyed in his memoirs, he was thankful to the Russians but would not allow his personal feelings to stand in the way of what was good for Afghanistan.

On the other hand, the British saw him as a strong leader and accepted his claim to the throne. Thus a treaty was signed in Shamali, north of Kabul, and the war officially ended on 21 April 1881. The British immediately started aiding Abdur Rahman so that he could bring the anarchical countryside under control.

In 1880–81 alone he received 3,615,009 Indian rupees. The British also undertook to give him an annual subsidy of 1,200,000 rupees, with which he was to pay his troops and to strengthen the defences of Afghanistan’s northwest frontier. By 1889, the Indian government had given him 74 guns, 25,000 breech loading rifles, 11,500 muzzle-loading rifles, and several million rounds of ammunition.

(Gregorian 1969: 131)

After defeating the forces of his paternal cousin, Ayub Khan in Kandahar, Amir Abdur Rahman faced no further challenge from other royal claimants. With Abdur Rahman came a relative break with former practices of paternalism, tribal autonomy and entrenched leaderships. He is regarded as the founder of the Afghan 'nation-state' because he was successfully applying the same laws and regulations to all tribes and ethnic groups. The Amir, aware of the anarchical rule of his predecessors, recorded his consternation in his two-volume autobiography.

Every priest, mullah and chief of every tribe and village considered himself an independent king, and for about 200 years past, the freedom and independence of many of these priests were never broken by their sovereigns. The Mirs of Turkistan, the Mirs of Hazarah, the chiefs of Ghilzai were all stronger than their Amirs.

(Munshi vol. i, 1900: 217)

To turn Afghanistan from a tribal state into a unitary central state or nation, the amir passed proclamations, wrote pamphlets and spread his edicts through *jarchis* (town-criers) informing his subjects of their duties, first to the king and then to their country. Thus when faced with disobedience and uprisings he

invoked the concept of divine right of kings; when threatened by the 'two Infidels (Russia and Britain, he taunted his subjects) ... the name of Afghans should not have been given you...' and if the country complained of high taxes or of his oppression he used a father-son relation to justify his actions, '...the kindness and compassion of the Kings towards his subjects resembles the feeling of a father towards his son...'; when he was faced by a strong tribe like the Ghilzai, he used 'the principle of *divide et impera*, exploiting the traditional rivalry of the Durrani and the Ghilzais to suppress a Ghilzai rebellion'; when faced with the Shi'ah mutiny, 'Abdur Rahman appealed to the orthodoxy and fanaticism of the Sunni Muslims' and when he wanted to subdue the Uzbek and Tajik principalities in the north, he would evoke 'memories of the former greatness of the Durrani empire to muster the support of the Afghan [Pashtun] tribes' and so on.

(Gregorian 1969: 131–3)

Thus Abdur Rahman mounted campaigns for sixteen of his twenty-one years' reign and succeeded in creating the strong central power necessary for a nation-state or unitary state (see Table 2.1, p. 58 for list of campaigns).

Southall writes, 'the unitary state is a structure in which there is a central monopoly of power, exercised by a specialised administrative staff within defined territorial limits...' (Southall 1970: 260). Though Abdur Rahman ran his administration with the help of 'ten clerks', nevertheless

Table 2.1 Conquests of Abdur Rahman, the 'Iron Amir'

<i>Name of tribal group/opponent or region</i>	<i>Dates</i>
Ayub Khan and followers (Kandahar Pashtuns)	1881
Laghman (eastern Pashtun region)	1881
Taraki Ghilzai (south-western Pashtun region)	1881–82
Kunar (eastern Pashtun region)	1882
Wali of Maimana (northern Uzbek leader)	1882
Mir (Tajik leader) of Sheghnan and Roshan (NE Badakhshan)	1882
Shinwari (eastern Pashtuns)	1882–92
Mangal of Zurmat (southern Pashtun region)	1883–84
Wali of Maimana (submitted without fighting)	1884
Laghman (eastern Pashtun region)	1885–86
Ghilzai (south-western Pashtuns)	1886–88
Mohammad Ishaq Khan (Pashtun royal claimant in the north)	1888
Safi (Pashtuns of Kunar-eastern region)	1888–96
Badakhshan (Tajik north-eastern region)	1889
Khan of Asmar (eastern Pashtun leader)	1890
Hazarajat (central Shi'ah region)	1891–93
Kafiristan (Nuristan, north-eastern region) converted to Islam	1895–96

he had his own version of a cabinet and parliament that he consulted. However much his subjects disliked the amir, he was the first king who succeeded in breaking the hold on power by tribes, saints and mullahs.

There has been a great deal of adverse publicity, especially in the post-Soviet withdrawal period by secessionist groups such as the Shi'ah Hazarah, the Tajik and the Uzbek, armed groups accusing the amir of taking the side of the Pashtuns at the expense of other ethnic groups. The Shi'ah *Hezb-i-Wahdat* and the small Tajik *Shura-i-Nezar* groups are the most vocal of such propaganda. As can be seen, most of his campaigns were against the Pashtuns and his punishment of the Safi, Shinwari and Ghilzai Pashtuns were severe and legendary. The amir, without any favour or prejudice, used his 147,400 troops and his extensive intelligence network to quell uprisings and to create a strong government and a viable nation-state.

Amir Abdur Rahman, as stated, is regarded as the founder of the Afghan 'nation-state'. A recent observer in a comparative work on the Amir's moral imperatives and the view that the Afghans have of him writes: 'As I began to recognize the distinctiveness of Abdur Rahman's moral station, I also became aware of the way in which his reign appeared to function as something of a divide in the people's minds, and one of the main reasons for this appears to have been his association with the founding of the nation-state' (Edwards 1996: 27). The amir, in creating a nation-state, had to subdue all rebellious Afghan tribal and ethnic groups. Not surprisingly, they hated the king for his uncompromising imposition of central authority. However, as an epitaph to his strong central rule, there was not a single major inter-tribal or ethnic war during his twenty-one-year

reign. His drive for modernisation included the completion of the transitional cycle from a segmentary to a unitary state, the founding of a modern army, the employing of Europeans, exploiting the country's mineral resources, and devising plans to implement his internal and external policies.

Internal 'nationalisation' policy

Abdur Rahman, unlike his predecessors, did not appoint his sons or other royal family members as governors to provinces. In the long run this policy was successful, as after his death there was no scramble for the throne. Members of the royal household were kept in Kabul, sometimes to oversee government departments and to advise the king. The king also had two important consultative bodies, the Supreme Council, his equivalent of a modern cabinet, and the *Loya Jirga*, his version of a parliament. The Supreme Council members were religious leaders, heads of the various government bureaux and departments. Members of the *Loya Jirga* were the leaders of tribes, ethnic groups, certain members of the royal lineage and provincial religious leaders. He also established a network of spies as his intelligence service, to serve as his 'eyes and ears'. His European experts mined copper and iron with which he minted his currency. The establishment of his 'single monetary unit, the Kabuli rupee ... replaced a number of regional currencies that had been artificially inflated to equal the Kabuli rupee' (Munshi vol. i, 1900: 203). The Amir in his proclamations emphasised the 'Afghan' identity of his subjects (Gregorian 1969: 130). He abolished the *sar-mardeh* poll tax that was imposed on non-Pashtuns for not being in the army. Abdur Rahman was not going to relax on other taxes, as he needed these to run his government and to pay for his army. He was never satisfied with what he got.

'One quarter of the money which is rightly mine, I get without trouble; one quarter I get by fighting for it; one quarter I do not get at all; and those who ought to pay the fourth quarter do not know into whose hands they should place it'.

(Munshi vol. i, 1900: 203)

He also transferred some 18,000 Ghilzai families from south-west to northern Afghanistan. This important move had several implications: first, to break the six-year long Ghilzai resistance to his rule; second, to ensure the safety of the northern border against Turkman raids and Russian incursions; and third, in his attempt to create a modern state, it was his way of encouraging assimilation. Later, the Durrani and other sub-tribes were also re-located in the north (Gregorian 1969: 133; Nancy Tapper 1983: 233–58).

Abdur Rahman's attempt at modernisation could best be described as

what the French call 'nationalisation', meaning establishing a framework of national infrastructure, such as an army, roads, mines, intelligence and an administrative network. The amir, from his Russian experience, was interested in material progress and wanted to create the infrastructure to accommodate modernisation and to spur further progress.

The backbone of the amir's success in quelling uprisings and keeping peace and security was the formation of a modern army and intelligence network. He tried to treat all citizens as equal. He removed previous privileges from the royal clan and also from khans and maliks. He made sure all obeyed the same state laws. He gave freedom to his provincial governors to break down territorial claims by local tribes and ethnic groups and to stop tribal systems from operating alongside or in opposition to the state system. 'Any signs of discontent were immediately put down . . . Land was sold and resold without any regard to the traditional joint ownership of village lands by the clan or lineages. The army was on hand to seal such transactions, if necessary' (Dupree 1980: 420). The Iron Amir thus laid the foundations of the modern Afghan state.

However, the tribal system and its claim to tribal lands were never completely eradicated. People in the tribal areas, especially those near Kabul, faced with a strong ruler, his spies and his army, were pragmatic enough to go along with his wishes. After the amir's death, his son Habibullah adopted a moderate and conciliatory manner, allowing all those who were exiled, accused of rebellion against his father, to return to their villages. The tribes then also re-established their grip over their communal lands.

External policy

The external policies of Abdur Rahman in accordance with the treaty of Gandomak of 1876 were to a large extent in the hands of the British and there was little the Amir could do about it. He was constantly faced with the danger of Russian expansion from the north. According to Gandomak, the British took it upon themselves to speak on behalf of Afghanistan in international conferences and, most importantly, to delineate Afghan borders with all three of its neighbours, Iran, Russia and British India. Apart from the border (north of Sistan) with Iran, which was to the equal dissatisfaction of both countries, the borders with Russia and Britain were to the detriment of Afghanistan. The Russians took thousands of square kilometres of land in Punjdeh (1873) and Wakhan (1891),³ and with British India came the demarcation of the Durand Line (1893), which split most Pashtun tribes. The Durand Line was at first regarded as 'a line' separating the 'sphere of influences' of the two countries but was later turned into a 'boundary'. Of all the borders, it was the Durand Line that Afghans especially objected to, and questioned its legal validity, as the treaty is considered to have been signed 'under duress' between two unequal partners. The legal invalidity of this treaty was

particularly underlined as Afghans argued that a treaty signed between them and the British government (1893 and 1923) could not be transferred to a third country, Pakistan, which came into being in 1947 and was not the inheritor of British India. Of the two newly created states (India and Pakistan), India is in a better position to be the inheritor of imperial Britain, because she took over British assets and accepted that country's legal and international obligations.

The Durand Line has become a bone of contention between Afghanistan and Pakistan regarding the irredentism of Pashtunistan, the land of the Pashtuns. Abdur Rahman in his autobiography repeatedly stated that he never considered any Pashtun areas as permanently ceded to the British. Even Sir Mortimer Durand, the foreign secretary in India who drew the 'line', did not anticipate annexation. 'Durand . . . did not propose to move forward the administrative border of India, but merely pushed for political control' (Sykes 1926: 219).⁴

The Iron Amir is rare amongst Afghan kings in that he died a natural death, in bed, after having ruled for twenty-one years. It is also to his credit that after his death, there were no skirmishes between contenders to the throne. His son Habibullah (1901–19) whom he had groomed for succession took over from him. While Abdur Rahman was not successful in encouraging modern education, foreign trade and banking, these were to be achieved to a certain extent by his son and grandson Amanullah. The Iron Amir himself saw some of these shortcomings that he left to his offspring:

I hope and pray that if I do not succeed in my lifetime in the great desire for making railways, introducing telegraph and steamers, working the mines, opening banks, issuing banknotes, inviting travellers and capitalists from all parts of the world, opening universities and other institutions in Afghanistan, my sons and successors will carry out these desires of my heart and make Afghanistan what I desire it to become.

(Munshi vol. ii, 1900: 173, 212–13)⁵

Habibullah, like his father, continued the drive for modernisation by strengthening central authority in maintaining the efficacy of the army. He founded the country's first military college (Harbiah), and also the first high school (Habibiah), after his name, on the pattern of a French lycée. This was to become the founding of the Afghan public school system developed in the years to come. He started a bi-monthly paper, *Seraj-ul Akhbar*, which also served as an important source of inspiration for Indian nationalists who smuggled and distributed its anti-British articles in India. Furthermore, he established the country's first printing press. Habibullah also employed many Western technicians and built a hydro-electric power station to provide electricity to his palace and some parts of Kabul. He extended roads and built *rabats*, the equivalent of today's

motels, to ease communication amongst different peoples of the country. Another of Habibullah's important achievements was the readmission of most of the tribal and ethnic leaders, who in wars with his father had been exiled or had fled the country. Thus, most Hazarah Shi'ah who had taken shelter in Iran or Baluchestan returned home. Also, Mahmud Tarzi, whose family had spent twenty-two years in Syria, came back and became the closest friend of the king. It was he who translated Jules Verne's adventures for the king, who was a fan of Verne, and also it was Tarzi who started the bi-monthly *Seraj-ul Akhbar* paper and ran it for seven years. Tarzi's daughter was married to Amanullah and this pioneer of journalism was to play a decisive role in the reigns of both the son and grandson of the Iron Amir.

Amanullah the Great Reformer: 1919–29

Habibullah, upon embarking on a hunting expedition, left his third son Amanullah in charge of the treasury in Kabul. The amir was murdered on that fatal hunting trip and his murderer was never found.⁶ Once again only one of his sons, Amanullah, assumed power and there was no serious attempt within the royal family to challenge him. Although initially Amanullah's elder brother and his father's brother expressed an interest in becoming king, Amanullah's energy and political awareness soon proved too difficult for them to challenge. In a public meeting on 18 February 1919, Amanullah gave a stirring speech in which he vowed to bring the murderers of his father to justice. At this meeting, he also doubled the salaries of the troops, believing in the key role of the army, like his father and grandfather before him. Amanullah had been the leader of the *mashrutah khahan*, reformist movement, at the court since World War One. He was privately educated, well informed about Western culture and married to the half-Syrian daughter of Mahmud Beg Tarzi. The attractive and well-educated queen had much influence over this twenty-nine-year-old king. At his coronation (1 March 1919) the king 'announced three goals: complete Afghan independence, the punishment of his father's murderers, and the abolition of *begeer*, literally "to seize", a kind of forced labour resembling the medieval corvée and much practised by landlords in territories not inhabited by Pashtuns' (Fletcher 1965: 187). Two days later he wrote to the British, who were monitoring his speeches, of his accession and the willingness of the 'independent and free' government of Afghanistan to conclude agreements of a commercial nature with Britain.

Amanullah started by reforming the royal family. Up until his time, most members of the royal family would hold their own *darbars*, or courts, and any person with a complaint could go to them. Worse still, if someone was not successful at one, he might go to another until he obtained the favours he wanted. Amanullah asked Tarzi to reform this system and

Tarzi, using the Ottoman model, created the modern cabinet in which he was the foreign minister and Abdul Qodus the prime minister. The different ministries took over what previously was done in the *darbars* and much more besides.

Three more foreign language colleges were founded: *Isteglal Lycée*, a French-language high school staffed by French teachers in 1923; Nejat, a German language college mostly staffed by Germans, in 1924; and *Ghazi*, an English language college with English staff in 1928. The king sent many graduates of these colleges as well as some officials in the government abroad for further education.

Amanullah's imposition of a war on the British in 1919 to force them to relinquish responsibility for Afghanistan's foreign affairs and the subsequent British recognition of Afghanistan as an independent state made Amanullah a hero for many Muslims. The Islamic world at this time was looking for a new Caliph, as Mustafa Kemal in Turkey had overthrown the last Ottoman Caliph in March of 1924. In India the Khalifate Party, which wanted to settle Muslims in Islamic states, was also gathering momentum. In 1920 several thousand Indian Muslims were encouraged to sell their property and to go on *hijrat*⁷ to Afghanistan. Amanullah, who had seen the collapse of the *khilafat* in Turkey, had the ambition to declare Afghanistan as the land of the caliph or *khilafat* and was at first willing to receive these Muslims. It later dawned on him, however, that a small country like Afghanistan could not house the hundreds of millions of Muslims in the subcontinent. Eventually the *muhajir*, or immigrants, had to return to India at great personal cost.

Amanullah's greatest challenge to conservative Afghan society was the introduction of co-education and the attempt to remove the veil from women and to ask all Afghans in Kabul to wear Western clothes.⁸ Amanullah's sister and wife were also active in women's projects, establishing *mo's-esah naswan*, the Women's Institute. The king also instituted the education of the country's two million or so nomads and sent a limited number of teachers to follow the larger groups and to teach them literacy. The king called for a *Loya Jirga* in 1923 to approve his first constitution for Afghanistan, in which the power of the religious establishment was curtailed and women were not required to wear the veil. The *Loya Jirga* of a thousand representatives rejected these as contrary to the injunctions of Islam and Afghan tradition. The king, however, determined to see it through, later asked about one hundred of those representatives who were in favour of the reform to sign the constitution.

Four years later, against the advice of his close associates, the king embarked on a visit to major Muslim and European capitals, Moscow and Delhi. No other Afghan ruler had undertaken such a diplomatic mission before. The tour started in December 1927 and lasted till July 1928. On this tour, diplomatic treaties with Poland, Latvia, Finland, Switzerland, Liberia, Egypt and Japan were signed and the king met with heads of

states in Persia, Turkey, India and Egypt, and with government leaders in Rome, Paris, London, Brussels, Bern, Berlin, Warsaw and Moscow.

The king also met with Mustafa Kemal (also known as Attaturk), who was familiar with the radical Muslim ruler's reforms. 'Attaturk warned Amanullah not to start large-scale social and political reforms until he had a strong, well-trained army, and promised to send some of his best officers to train the Afghans' (Dupree 1980: 451). On his return, Mahmud Tarzi, the champion of reform and many other close friends and family members who knew of the adverse propaganda mounted against the royal couple amongst the tribes, asked Amanullah to take Attaturk's advice. Amanullah, full of new ideas and enthusiasm, 'rushed headlong into his disorganised plans to change Afghanistan from a collection of ethnic groups and tribes into the outward appearance of modern nationhood' (Dupree 1980: 452). Thus his efforts to build a modern nation abruptly came to an end. Amanullah regarded the technological progress of the West, but did not appreciate that this advancement was based on long-term economic and social developments, while his reforms of a social and cultural nature needed time, a sound economic and educative basis, and the support of the populace if they were to be realised.

Revolt at home

While the king was on his foreign tour, a revolt broke out in the Khost region of Paktia headed by two *mullahs*, Abdullah (known as Mullah-i-Lang, the limping mullah), and Abdul Rashid. Both were against Amanullah's modernisation plans and when speaking to the public they would hold Amanullah's *nezam-namah* (constitution) in one hand and the Quran in another, asking the audience, 'do you accept the Book of Allah or the *nezam-namah* of Amanullah?' Additionally, the son of the conqueror of Maiwand,⁹ Abdul Karim, having sensed the discontent against the king came from India to lay claim to the throne. Karim was unsuccessful, however, in his dynastic assertions, as no tribe would come to his aid. Amanullah's forces also arrested Mullah-i-Lang, and had him executed in Kabul. Successfully averting both these hostile forces, however, did not end opposition to Amanullah. The British, who disliked Amanullah for his fiery anti-British speeches and the war in 1919, spread photographs of Amanullah's queen amongst the tribes, showing her without a veil amongst the *farangis* (foreigners). Rumours were rife that Amanullah had become an infidel or that the couple had been swapped for non-Afghan look-alikes and so forth.

The first major challenge to the king came from the eastern Pashtun tribe of Shinwari. While the king sent his troops to quell them, some defected joining the tribal *lashkar* against him. Meanwhile a bandit with military experience, Habibullah, known as Bachai Saqaw (son of a water carrier) attacked Kabul, forcing the king to flee in his Rolls Royce to Kan-

dahar. From Kandahar the king organised another army that was easily defeated in Ghazni by the Ghilzai. Subsequently, Bachai Saqaw held Kabul for over nine months (January–October 1929).

The Tajik Bachai Saqaw from Kohistan north of Kabul was attracted originally by the high pay for the soldiers and this was the reason he enrolled in the army of Amanullah. He was illiterate, not a dutiful or submissive soldier and was time and again punished for disobedience in the army. He eventually decided to escape to Peshawar 'where he operated a teahouse as a front for smuggling, disposing of stolen property, and a variety of other, equally illegal activities. Returning to Afghanistan in 1928, he gathered a band of followers ... and became the scourge of the caravan routes across the Hindu Kush' before he took control of Kabul (Fletcher 1965: 217). The Pashtuns, who had been in power since 1747, 'especially resented the usurpation of the throne by a non-Afghan [non-Pashtun], a lowly and illiterate Tajik bandit' (Gregorian 1969: 280). With the government treasury depleted and the mines idle, Bachai Saqaw started to print his money on leather, which no one took seriously. The country was going through another civil war, however brief, and its new ruler was finding it difficult to raise money. He therefore:

reverted to another familiar practice, extortion, forcing the well-to-do merchants and citizens of Kabul to contribute to his treasury ... according to Morrish: 'for months life in Kabul was terrible. None was safe, houses were pillaged indiscriminately, women were ravished, and a reign of terror was established unprecedented in the annals of Bloody Afghan History'. Outside the city Bachai selected members of his clan to act as informers ... to compile reports on the approximate wealth of citizens ... and the income of the prospective victims.

(Gregorian 1969: 281)

Despite the utter abhorrence of most Pashtuns and inhabitants of the urban areas, there was no national leader to confront Bachai Saqaw and his supporters. When three out of the five Musaheban (lineage name, meaning equerry) brothers, headed by the former General Nadir Khan (who Amanullah had posted as ambassador to Paris) returned to Afghanistan in February 1929, they provided the necessary leadership. Nader Khan, having gathered together his tribal army, had to cancel plans of attacking Kabul twice because of infighting that had developed amongst his tribal forces. His brother Shah Wali, spent seven months in Zazi,¹⁰ and his other brother Shah Mahmud with other tribes in Paktia managed to organise a tribal army from amongst the tribes of Paktia (Zazi,¹¹ Mangal, Zadran, Ahmadzai, Tota Khel Wazir and Darwish Khel Wazir) and then attacked Kabul, driving Bachai Saqaw and his followers back to Kohistan. Bachai Saqaw was at first given clemency but was later executed along with his seventeen lieutenants.¹² Nader Khan who arrived

in Kabul two weeks after its capture (17 October) was selected, by a *jirga* of those tribal representatives who had re-captured Kabul, as the 'King of Afghanistan'.

Nader Shah: 1929–33

Nader Shah's (then known as Nader Khan) first act was to dissociate himself from Amanullah's modernisation plans and, unlike the ex-king, he gave the mullahs, *sufis* and the religious constituency a prominent role in his administration. The British, always wary of chaos on their borders, stepped in to aid Nader Khan in curbing the ongoing civil war just as they had helped the Iron Amir by providing financial and military aid. This consisted of 10,000 rifles, five million cartridges and £170,000 in cash. Many Afghans, who were suspicious of British meddling in their affairs, believed that the Musesheban brothers must have come to power with the blessing of the British and used this aid as a proof. Some people were also disappointed with Nader Khan for not recalling Amanullah to resume power. Most of the tribes who fought for the restoration of the monarchy had been under the impression that the Musesheban brothers, as a prominent family at the court of Habibullah and Amanullah, and with Nader Khan being one of Amanullah's generals and ambassadors, were fighting to restore power to King Amanullah. The Shinwari tribe who revolted against Amanullah and were the main cause of his overthrow, revolted again in May 1930, this time against Nader Khan and in support of Amanullah, saying that their previous revolt was 'not so much anti-Amanullah as against the local tax-collectors at Jelalabad . . . the Kohistani Tajik, led by Purdel, revolted in July 1930', but the latter were once again put down by the Pashtuns (Dupree 1980: 460). Nader Khan knew the sentiments of the tribes, and was perturbed by these revolts. He called another *Loya Jirga* in September 1930, which again proclaimed him king (Frazer-Tytler 1967: 227).

Nader Khan followed a *laissez-faire* political course and wanted to be on good terms with both Britain and the Soviet Union. The Central Asian freedom fighters, that the Russians termed *basmachi*, thieves, lost a supporter when Amanullah was gone. There were close to a million of these rebels who had sought refuge in Afghanistan. The military wing of the *basmachi* was headed by one of their leaders called Ibrahim Beg. Their forces would attack the Russians, and then take refuge in Afghanistan. On one occasion the Russian troops entered Afghanistan for some forty miles in 'hot pursuit' of the *basmachi*. Nader Khan, who was careful not to provoke the Russians, sent his younger brother Shah Mahmud to impress on the foreign fighters that they must not endanger their host country. Shah Mahmud, having failed to disarm or disperse the *basmachis* from near the Russian border, chased Ibrahim Beg over the border into the hands of his enemies who executed him in April 1931 (Frazer-Tytler 1967: 230).

In 1931, Nader Shah wrote another constitution, amending the articles regarding women's emancipation and co-education. This constitution was,

a hodgepodge of unworkable elements. Extracts from the Turkish, Iranian and French constitutions and the 1923 Constitution of Amanullah . . . The 1931 constitution only partly suited the Afghan character . . . described as tribal, authoritarian, patrilineal.

(Dupree 1980: 464–9)

In 1933, Nader Khan and his elder brother were killed in revenge for the killing of Ghulam Nabi Charkhi. The Charkhis, like the Musesheban, were a prominent family, serving as generals and ambassadors at the court of Abdur Rahman, Habibullah and Amanullah. The Charkhis regarded the Musesheban as usurpers and it was this difference that sparked the feud between the two. After Nader Khan's assassination, the deceased king's twenty-year-old son, Mohammad Zaher, was put on the throne by his paternal uncle Shah Mahmud. But for the next thirty years the king's two uncles Hashem Khan (1929–46) and Shah Mahmud (1946–53) himself ran the country followed by his paternal cousin and brother-in-law Mohammad Daoud (1953–63) as prime ministers. During these three decades, apart from the *wish zalmian*, the 'awakened youth', an intellectual movement on the pattern of the Young Turks, there were no significant reforms or innovative initiatives on a national level.

Hashem Khan died in office (1946) and his nephew Daoud replaced his brother in a palace intrigue in 1953. Daoud himself was dismissed in 1963 by the king for dragging Afghanistan to the brink of war with Pakistan over the 'Pashtunistan' issue. It was only in 1963 that King Zaher Shah, once all his ambitious elders had died, took control of the country. A new and democratic constitution was passed in 1964, which transformed the traditional absolute and authoritarian monarchy into a constitutional monarchy on the European model, defining and limiting the role of the royal family. The period between 1963 and the end of monarchy in 1973 are known as the 'decade of constitution'. A fuller discussion of this decade will be presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

The geopolitical position of Afghanistan: its vulnerability to external forces

Ptolemy, and other geographers of the ancient world applied the name 'Aryana' to what is now Afghanistan . . . Kabul according to one source figures in history as early as 2000 BC . . . and the oldest Iranian chronicles record Turanian (Scythian) races as the inhabitants of west and north [Durrani land] of Helmand River.

(Wilber 1962: 11)

The Greek historian Herodotus (b.490–80BC) records the provinces of ‘Pactiuke’ Paktia and ‘Pactyca’ Paktika and its Pashtun inhabitants (Herodotus 1966: 439). Thus Afghanistan’s geo-political position can be traced through the centuries. The aim here is not to account for over four millennia of recorded history but to discuss the actions of the two imperial powers, Russia and Britain, in the nineteenth century, as they sandwiched Afghanistan between them. To understand this, we have to briefly review British and Russian policies regarding Afghanistan (see Map 5).

In the nineteenth century, Britain and Russia each regarded the other as a threat to their respective imperial designs. The British, after establishing themselves as the East Indian Trading Company on the coast of Madras (1752), slowly worked their way north and east-wards, occupying Delhi and the Punjab in about a century (see Appendix 8). Russia too, starting from the steppes of the north, rapidly took one Khanate after another approaching the northern borders of Afghanistan by the late nineteenth century. Bolshevik forces occupied the Kingdom of Bokhara in 1920 (see Appendix 9 and Map 5).

The Russians in a circular despatch of 1864, known as the Gortchakow’s Circular, had set Sir Darya and Issyk Kul Lake as the limit of their expansion. In later years when Britain pointed to this self imposed limit of the Russians, they would refer to the Memorandum of 5 April 1875, saying that ‘the Tsar had never entered into an engagement with any power binding him to a policy of non-aggression’ (Ghose 1960: 25). Their argument for new lands and the policy approach as explained continued. Thus Afghanistan and its eastern possessions, as well as Punjده and Zulfiqar in the north fell to these Russo-British ambitions. Britain also designed to colonise Afghanistan in order to get even closer to the Russians. However, when they realised that the Afghans were by and large unwilling to comply, they decided to declare it as a ‘buffer state’, or as stated in the 1907 Convention of St Petersburg, a free and independent country, agreeing not to interfere in its internal affairs. A promise neither was serious to keep. The British went to war with Afghanistan in 1919 and as Russian interest led to the Soviet invasion, the consequences of which forms a major part of this work, a brief review of this contact is pertinent to the later discussion.

In 1885 the Russians occupied the Afghan Punjده in northwest Afghanistan. The Afghan king, Amir Abdur Rahman, on an official visit to British India, was in Lahore at the time and requested military help from Britain, but was assured that the Russians did not intend to cross the river, implying that Punjده should be considered to have been annexed. In 1896 Britain and Russia signed a treaty making the Amu River the official border between Afghanistan and Tsarist Russia. The 1907 Convention of St Petersburg followed this a few years later, when both Britain and Russia agreed not to occupy or annex any part of Afghanistan, nor to interfere in the internal affairs of that country (Amastutz 1986: 9). The British however, were determined not to relinquish their hold on Afghanistan’s foreign policy. On the Afghan side, the twenty-nine-year-old King Amanul-

lah declared Afghanistan free from British diplomatic over-lordship in 1919, sending troops over the border to the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) in the Kurem valley, thus provoking the third Anglo-Afghan war (May–June 1919). After a short war, Amanullah won back control of Afghan foreign affairs. But it was during the ten years of his reign that Afghanistan grew closer to the new Soviet Socialist Republics, which were also the first states to recognise its independence. In November 1919, Lenin wrote to Amanullah:

The workers and peasants government instructs its embassy in Afghanistan to engage in discussions with the view to the conclusion of trade and other friendly agreements . . . is inclined to grant such assistance on the widest scale to the Afghan nation, and to repair the injustice done by the former government of the Czars . . . by adjusting the Soviet-Afghan frontier so as to add to the territory of Afghanistan at the expense of Russia.

(Carr 1953: 238–9, vol. 3; Amastutz 1986: 11)

This was taken to mean the return of Punjdeh and Zulfiqar, as those were the parts of Afghanistan which the Russians had taken by force. However, this promise made by the founder of the Soviet state and brought to the attention of successive Soviet governments, was never honoured. On the other hand, Soviet aid in military and economic developments in the years following this initial contact grew out of all proportions.

In 1921, the Afghan-Soviet Treaty, the first international treaty that country signed after its revolution of 1917, dealt with trade rights and the promise of one million annual gold bars to Afghanistan. Other aid, such as eleven military aeroplanes and Soviet engineers to build roads, telegraph and telephone lines followed. Trade between the two countries steadily grew and the Soviet share of Afghanistan's foreign trade increased from 7 per cent in 1924–25 to 17 per cent in 1933–34; and from 24 per cent in 1938–39 to 79 per cent in the 1980s (Gregorian 1969: 333; Adamec 1967: 214, 245; Rubin 1995: 160–3).

The Afghan authorities in their contact with the Russians never forgot the advice of the Iron Amir, Abdur Rahman, who had spent twelve years in exile in Russian Central Asia because of a family squabble over the throne: 'My advice to you my heirs and descendants is never to trust the Russians'. This explains why Afghanistan in the nineteenth century repeatedly turned to Britain for aid (which rarely materialised) against the Russian encroachment. After the Second World War, when the United States replaced Britain as a world power, the Afghans requested economic and military aid from the Americans against the growing communist influence in the region as well as inside Afghanistan. However, the United States foreign policy-makers lacked the foresight to heed such requests. After the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, the Durand Line dispute

continued with Pakistan, turning into the bigger issue of 'Pashtunistan' in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus the Afghans were left with little choice other than asking for assistance from the Soviets. This came extremely rapidly. In 1956, after a high-level Soviet delegation visited Afghanistan, the Russians agreed to a concessionary loan of \$32 million for the purchase of Soviet weapons and by 1978 this aid grew in value to \$1,265 million still on the low interest rate of 2 per cent. The Afghan historian Sayed Qasem Reshtia values Soviet investment since the 1950s at 'over three billion dollars, primarily to develop – for their own ends – transport and communications systems and to train technical, military, and civilian personnel under Soviet instructors' (Reshtia 1984: 94). At the time of the communist coup in 1978, nearly 96 per cent of the Afghan army's weapons were Soviet made. US aid at this time made up merely 42 per cent of Russian aid, and consisted of loans and grants for training, education, road building, and an agricultural project near Kandahar. Soviet aid was actually greater than the combined aid Afghanistan obtained from the US, the different agencies of the UN, the World Bank and the NATO countries combined. By 1963, Soviet military instructors had replaced the longstanding Turkish military instructors, who had been involved in training the Afghan Army from the time of King Amanullah, a 'blood-brother' to Kemal Attaturk. Having brought Afghanistan into its orbit, the Russian terms were becoming unbearable for the Afghan governments of the 1960s and 1970s. The Soviets, fearful of losing Afghanistan to NATO or the West like its two other southern neighbours, Turkey and Iran, were putting pressure on Afghan governments not to allow personnel and engineers from NATO countries to begin searching for oil, gas and other mineral sources in northern Afghanistan. They considered such actions to be a national security risk. The Afghan president, Mohammad Daoud, who was on an official visit to the Soviet Union in April 1977, stormed out of a meeting with President Podgorny and Prime Minister Brezhnev on this issue. He told his Russian hosts that Afghanistan as an independent country had the right to invite whomsoever it wished to invite. Exactly one year later, pro-Moscow communist elements that had assumed power gunned down Daoud and his entire family.

The Russians, after a century and a half of various attempts and manoeuvres, could not control Afghanistan. Afghan and non-Afghan historians are of the opinion that after the success of the Bolshevik revolution, the Russians devised long-term political, economic and military plans and consistently worked to achieve them. These were to turn Afghanistan into a dependent state, vulnerable and responsive to Soviet pressure, and to separate it from other states in the region such as India, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey who were all pro-West and hostile to the Soviets. The Soviets, turning themselves into Afghanistan's number one economic partner and giving themselves the sole right to explore oil and gas in northern Afghanistan, discovered large reserves of natural gas. Their investment in this prospecting more than paid off, because they piped gas from the gas

wells in northern Afghanistan to their own pipelines, also installing the meters for the flow of gas on their side of the border. Taking advantage of the Afghan communists' dependence on them, they fixed a price much lower than that of the world market. In 1978 when I was researching into Zazi youths in the Afghan army, I came across Russian 'engineers' who were connected with the gas wells in the north. When I asked them why they were paying lower than international rates for the Afghan gas their reply was that the gas had a high level of sulphur and that no one else would buy it. They said that the Soviet Union was using it only in factories. When I asked them how they separated this gas from their own gas that also ran through the same pipelines from Uzbekistan to homes in Soviet cities, one of them got agitated and asked for my name and address, which I provided incorrectly. One concludes that they were probably no ordinary Russian engineers, and possibly were connected to the KGB (like so many other Russian personnel in Afghanistan at that time) as these same men were looking for me the next day at the Faculty of Letters, where I had told them I was teaching.

Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter centred on the three themes of the fragility of the state, its modernisation, and the influence exerted on it by external forces. The scramble for the throne and the struggles of kings to maintain their position was partly due to the absence of the rule of primogeniture or some other agreed method. Often dozens of sons from different mothers competed, paying no attention to the will of the king. No importance was attached to consulting the public through *jirgas* or *Loya Jirgas* to legitimise their position and hence wars and uncertainties in the nineteenth century were rife. These competitive forces can be seen as aspects of a segmentary lineage system. However, attempts were made by and after the Iron Amir to change this chaotic situation with some success. But the new centralised approach of 'nationalisation' is caught up in its dilemma of implementing modern reforms. The greatest obstacle in the twentieth century turns out not to have been tribal resistance to being ruled from a strong centre or the tribes losing their privileged position, but the need to reform the attitude of men towards women, especially in the urban centres, by admitting to a public role for women. Women's emancipation in the Western sense is seen as a threat to the fabric of patrilineal Afghan society and contrary to the injunctions of Islam. This issue preoccupies Afghan attitudes to this day. Afghan rulers, in attempting to implement a modern ('Western') conception of female emancipation and by initiating reforms, have either ignored Afghan culture and Islamic edicts or deliberately overlooked them, and this has been one of the main reasons for the issue's continued presence in Afghan politics. Rulers have disregarded the need to reconcile conservative Afghan culture and Islam with modern

requirements. Unless these core matters are addressed, the 'women issue' will continue to be regarded as provocative and challenging.

The geo-political position of Afghanistan, like the fragility of the state and the problems with modernisation has hardly changed, after two and a half centuries. If Britain and Russia were the two imperial states of the nineteenth century, the Soviet Union and the United States were the super-powers of the twentieth century, and now the United States is the only super-power around. If Afghanistan fought imperial Russia and Britain because it was encroached on and sandwiched between them, it has since been influenced by, received aid from, and fought against the Soviet Union. If the USA, having replaced Britain as a world power, had helped the Afghans against the Soviet Red Army, she also bombed Afghanistan over its refusal to hand over the alleged terrorist Osama Bin Laden. If Afghanistan was politically important for the imperial states in the nineteenth century, it has become, since the disintegration of the USSR, once again economically important by being the shortest route for the huge gas and oil reserves of Central Asia to the billion inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

In the 1880s the impression was created that the state had advanced from a segmentary to a unitary one and was becoming a nation-state in the process. Afghan governments since the 1880s have tried to strengthen central control and also to involve the people, either through *Loya Jirgas* or parliaments, in the affairs of the country, however limited their powers may have been. Through the expansion of roads, education and mass media, governments have tried to strengthen Afghan culture and identity. To this end, excavations of historic relics and conferences celebrating Afghan historic figures under the auspices of different UN bodies were aimed at cementing the fabric of Afghan ethnic and tribal links. But the decades of war and uncertainty since the overthrow of the monarchy in 1973, have brought into focus the importance of tribal and ethnic networks and the desire amongst some ethnic activists to exploit these and break away from the centre. The case of Afghanistan also demonstrates that statehood and nationhood is not something, once achieved, which can automatically be built on. Much depends on internal developments and also on what happens outside, in this case in neighbouring countries that share ethnic, racial and religious links with the people of Afghanistan. In other words, deep divisions within Afghan society exist. Since the late nineteenth century there have come rulers who wanted to modernise the state but were faced with internal blocks that needed to be overcome. Colonial powers, the British and the Tsarists, used these divisions to their own advantage knowing well that they could not buy or conquer the Afghans and so they agreed to turn Afghanistan into a vassal or buffer state. The Soviet Union broke this stand-off by its military and ideological invasion in 1979.