

AFGHANISTAN

A MODERN HISTORY

Monarchy, Despotism or Democracy? The Problems
of Governance in the Muslim Tradition

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PART II: THE DESCENT INTO CIVIL WAR AND ANARCHY

CHAPTER 6

The 'Saur Revolution' (1978-79)

The so-called 'Saur Revolution' was in fact a military coup carried out by leftist officers of the armed forces under the direction of the PDPA without any popular participation. It is generally agreed by the two PDPA factions that the putsch was planned for the late summer of 1978. But it was precipitated by the murder of the Parcham ideologue, Mir Akbar Khyber, who was led out of his house and shot dead by two gunmen on the night of 17 April. The funeral procession organized by the combined PDPA turned into an impressive demonstration by some 15,000 mourners, with both Taraki and Karmal making incendiary anti-imperialist speeches, as it was believed at the time that the CIA had had a hand in the assassination.

The PDPA alleged, however, after it had taken power, that the murder had been arranged by Daoud in order to flush out PDPA leaders and activists and to gauge the extent of the support they commanded. This is a more plausible theory¹ since, in the days following the murder, Daoud had the army cantonments carefully watched before arresting Taraki, Karmal and a few other known leaders on the night of 25-26 April. Strangely enough, Hafizullah Amin was not taken at the same time as the others. His house was searched, but no incriminating documents were found, and he was placed only under house arrest, until he was taken to the detention centre on the evening of the next day.

The episodes that were crucial to the success of the planned coup appear entirely fortuitous; indeed it is doubtful that it could have been carried out had they not occurred in this way. In the first place, the delay in placing Amin under detention with the others cannot be explained. Amin was the most dangerous of the PDPA leaders and the delay, combined with other circumstances, equally fortuitous, turned out to be of crucial importance. When the police knocked on his door on the evening of 25 April, Amin handed over his written plan of operations to his wife, to be hidden under a mattress in the children's bedroom. The police did not find it, and after they

left he sent his eldest son to Taraki's house to find out what was happening. The boy returned to report that Taraki had been taken away that evening. Taraki's arrest, which was expected, was the pre-arranged signal for the plan's execution by Khalqi officers in the armed forces.

But Amin, who was under house arrest, was in no position to pass on the plan to his courier, Faqir Mohammad Faqir, until Faqir himself arrived by chance at Amin's house on the morning of 26 April. Faqir had a low-profile position among the Khalqis and was not on Daoud's surveillance list. He was a frequent visitor at Amin's house and the police guards let him in as they mistook him for Amin's elder brother, to whom he bore a close physical resemblance. Thus Faqir was able to pass on Amin's written instructions to Syed Ghulabzoi, a junior officer in the air force, who had been designated in advance by Amin for the important task of briefing Khalqi officers in the air force and in the Fourth Armoured Corps based in Kabul on the details of the plan. On the evening of 26 April Amin was moved to a detention centre close to the presidential palace where the other PDPA leaders were being held pending a decision on their fate. In the meantime Amin had also been able to pass on a message through his son to another Khalqi activist, Engineer Zarif, with instructions to be transmitted to those responsible for the take-over of the radio station, once the coup got under way the following day.

Other episodes that greatly assisted the PDPA also turned out to be somewhat fortuitous. After the crackdown on the communist leaders, parties and entertainments were held in the cantonments to celebrate the arrests. According to a PDPA assessment quoted by Anwar:

The Defence Minister had ordered that all armed forces detachments to be on a war footing and celebrate the occasion the next morning with folk dancing and meetings. This treacherous order proved very useful to the forces of the revolution, as the Khalqi elements participated in these meetings where they contacted their unit commanders for instructions without raising suspicion.

On the morning of 27 April a Khalqi officer of the Fourth Corps, Major Aslam Watanjar, called on his commander with a request to draw six shells for each of the 12 tanks in his unit so that it could be in combat readiness as instructed, to which the general readily complied. However, by adding a zero to the requisition order signed by his commander, Watanjar was able to draw sufficient ammunition to arm ten times that number of tanks. According to Amin's plan, a squadron of the air force from the Bagram air base was to buzz the presidential palace at noon. This was to be the signal for the Fourth Corps to move in on the palace.

But things did not go strictly according to plan. The senior rebel officer at the Bagram air base, Abdul Qadir, a Parchami and a former vice-commander of the Afghan air force during Karmal's brief honeymoon with Daoud, was to

take over the base and command the entire air operation in Kabul. Instead, possibly confused or nervous, he locked himself in his office. The planned low sorties over the presidential palace at noon did not therefore take place until 4.30 pm, after a number of tanks from the Fourth Corps were rushed to Bagram by Watanjar to take over the base. Ghulabzoi and Asadullah Sarwari, a former officer and Amin's chief recruiter for the air force, had been at Kabul airport since morning. The failure of Qadir and his squadron to appear over the Kabul skies at noon prompted them to take over the airport with the help of two tanks dispatched by Watanjar.

In fact, the most important role in the coup was played by Watanjar and his Fourth Corps which had ringed Daoud's palace and fired the first shell, as planned, at the Kabuli 'hour of the cannon'. Traditionally, like Hong Kong's famous 'noon gun', the hour was sounded by the firing of a cannon. This was the signal for all the other tanks to enter into action despite the fact that the squadron from Bagram had failed to appear. Daoud brought to a stop the cabinet meeting he was chairing at the time, advising his ministers to escape from the palace and save their lives. Only the defence and interior ministers managed to escape in order to rally the loyalist forces they could muster, unsuccessfully as it turned out. The other ministers sought refuge at the royal mosque in the palace grounds. The sound of firing from the palace was the signal for Khalqi supporters everywhere to take over the armouries and command centres in Kabul, summarily shooting those officers who resisted and placing under arrest those who did not.

The fiercest resistance, however, was offered by the 2000-man presidential guard at the Arg palace commanded by a closet Parchami and, like Daoud and his royal clan, a Mohammadzai Pashtun who had evidently not been apprised of the coup.² The guard fought almost to the last man and the last round to defend the fortress-like palace before it was taken in the early hours of 28 April. Two infantry divisions also offered resistance. One of them tried to prevent the take-over of the radio station. But infantry was no match for an armoured force led by determined officers.

The rebel officers had no choice but to continue once they had started. The arrests of the PDPA leaders implied that their sympathizers in the armed forces had to take urgent action to forestall their own arrests and certain execution by Daoud. The palace meeting was called to discuss the fate of the arrested PDPA leaders, and there could have been no doubt that the penalty for treason would be death for all those involved if the coup failed. Daoud and his family were killed in a burst of gunfire after he drew a gun and wounded one of the rebel officers who had entered the palace in the early hours of the morning of 28 April to arrest him after the annihilation of the presidential guard.

But Daoud was still alive and fighting on the evening of 27 April when Qadir (in Persian) and Watanjar (in Pashtu) announced on Radio Kabul that a 'military council' headed by Qadir had taken power. This announcement was followed by the traditional Muslim invocation and then by a brief statement to the effect that future policy would be based on 'the preservation of the principles of the sacred teachings of Islam' and the 'promotion of the advancement and progress of our beloved people of Afghanistan'. Neither Marxism nor socialism were mentioned.

As was to be expected in the circumstances, there was much confusion in people's minds about what was really happening. The coup was carried out in a general atmosphere of indifference as far as the man in the street was concerned. The presidential guards at the palace resisted what they thought were reactionary right-wing elements in the armed forces who were opposed to Daoud's progressive policies. But the rightists themselves were confused and divided over the nature of the change. In Pakistan a member of the Mujaddidi family issued a press statement saying that 'Islam-loving' elements had taken power. The Soviet news agency, Tass, referred in the next three days to a 'coup d'état' rather than a revolution. Except for a strong note from his government protesting against the arrests of the PDPA leaders, which the Soviet ambassador was unable to deliver to the foreign minister on 27 April, there was no Soviet involvement in what was purely an Afghan affair, notwithstanding Cold War-biased Western reports to the contrary.³

There was even greater confusion for several years in the media and in the literature as to the relative weight of the roles played by the various PDPA actors in the putsch. The communist practice of rewriting history did not help. There was the Taraki version in the flattering biography of the 'Great Leader', the Amin version produced after the overthrow of Taraki, and the Karmal version that prevailed after the Soviet invasion and the assassination of Amin.⁴

Three days after the coup, the formation of a Revolutionary Council of the People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan was publicly announced, with Taraki named as chairman and Karmal vice-chairman. According to Anwar, the Council consisted of 30 civilians drawn from the joint PDPA Central Committee, and five officers. The Council met on 1 May to choose a cabinet. Portfolios were evenly allotted to both Parchamis and Khalqis, with Taraki as prime minister, and Karmal, Amin and Watanjar as deputy prime ministers. The portfolios of Defence and Public Works were assigned respectively to two Parchamis, Abdul Qadir of the air force and Mohammad Rafi of the Fourth Armoured Corps, who were thus rewarded for the important roles they had played in the military operations.

But the power structure reflected in reality the outlines of an incipient struggle between Karmal and Amin, with the ineffectual and indecisive

Taraki in the background as a figurehead. What appeared on the surface as an equitable political balance was in fact a fearful symmetry, with the 'tiger' Amin, the actual architect of the revolution, waiting to pounce when the opportunity arose. As Anwar states:

What the Party had done was to set up not one but three governments within the government in an effort to maintain what it thought was a political balance. **Taraki was a sort of federal head of three governments.** For the Khalq Ministers, Amin was the Deputy Prime Minister, while the Parchamite members of the cabinet were answerable to Karmal only. The (Khalqi) Watanjar controlled his (Parchamite) army colleagues, Qadir and Rafi. No Deputy Prime Minister was supposed to interfere in the working of the Ministries which were not under his direct control. In other words, these three mini-cabinets were three distinct and conflicting groups. They even used to hold separate sessions. Karmal had succeeded in wresting the army from Amin's direct control, whose portfolio (Foreign Affairs) was really a device to distance him from his former constituency, namely the armed forces.⁵

But Amin needed Parchami support at this stage because of their widespread presence as moles in the civilian bureaucracy during the Daoud presidency, while he himself had concentrated his efforts on infiltrating and subverting the armed forces.

The Revolutionary Council was soon replaced by a Soviet-style Politburo where all major decisions were taken. Amin was not a Politburo member, neither were the military members of the cabinet. The inclusion of PDPA-inclined officers in the civilian Central Committee had been a bone of contention between Parchamis and Khalqis since the reunification of the two factions in 1977. But after the coup, the astute Amin changed his previous position to argue cogently for the inclusion of the officers who had played such an active role and risked their lives in bringing the Daoud regime to an end. This he did in a document produced and circulated by the army's political department, which his own men controlled, before a meeting of the Politburo scheduled for 24 May.⁶ This blow-by-blow account highlighted the role of Amin and the Khalqis in the revolution at the expense of Karmal and his Parchami followers, such as the commander of the presidential guard who had put up such a stiff resistance. The Parchamis, who now occupied half the cabinet posts, were painted as political opportunists, implying that they had been brought to power on the coat tails of the truly revolutionary Khalqis.

At the 24 May meeting the Politburo agreed, despite Karmal's opposition, to induct four officers into the Central Committee. Karmal's objections to the use of the term 'Khalq' to designate the victors without reference to the Parchami role were overruled by Taraki. The latter maintained that the term 'Khalq' was a true reflection of the party's unity, while Parcham was a symbol of factionalism. Karmal also proposed that the army pamphlet, with its

exclusive reference to the Khalqis, be withdrawn and confiscated on the grounds that it would give rise to internecine feuds, and be replaced by a more representative account to be produced by the Politburo itself. On the issue of the pamphlet, which included for the first time flattering references to Taraki as the 'Great Leader' and the 'Great Teacher', the wily Amin had correctly concluded that if Karmal objected to the pamphlet, it would become evident to Taraki, who was susceptible to flattery, that he was not willing to accept Taraki as the 'Great Leader' of the unified PDPA or Khalq (People), as the party was named when it was founded in 1965.

When reading the history of the period before the Soviet invasion of December 1979, it is easier now, with the benefit of hindsight, to discern a pattern, a truly Machiavellian design on the part of Hafizullah Amin. His first objective was to get rid of Karmal, towards whom he bore a congenital hatred and with whose policy of a 'national front' he disagreed, and next, to overthrow his own leader, Taraki.

On the very first day of the coup two incidents occurred when the fighting was still going on in which Taraki had openly sided with Karmal rather than bowing to Amin's own views. After they were released from detention and taken to the radio station, Karmal expressed the opinion that until there was complete certainty that the revolution had succeeded, it was inadvisable to remain at the station where they would be sitting ducks. Amin vehemently opposed the proposal, asserting that at this critical juncture the party leaders should stay close to the officers and to the scene of action and take direct command of the fighting. The cautious Taraki agreed with Karmal and went with him and others to seek the relative security of the airport. Amin stayed back to organize a makeshift operations room from where he could keep in touch with and encourage Khalqi officers in the various cantonments.⁷

The second incident occurred after Taraki and Karmal had returned to the radio station and a public announcement was being prepared. Against Amin's insistence that the party leader himself should read the announcement, Karmal argued that at this stage the direct involvement of Taraki, a known communist, could rally the opposition, especially right-wing officers in the armed forces. He proposed that the announcement should be made in Dari (Persian) by Qadir, known for his nationalistic views, to which Taraki agreed, offering Amin a compromise in the form of a Pashtu version to be read by the Khalqi Watanjar. Such incidents must have brought home to Amin the urgent need to wean Taraki away from Karmal's influence through flattery and sycophancy, and to put him off his guard before taking a shot at the indecisive dreamer and drunkard, Taraki himself. Amin did not waste time. In less than 18 months he had achieved both objectives.

Within three months of the coup, Amin had deftly outmanoeuvred the Parchamis. At a meeting of the Central Committee on 27 June, it was de-

cided that state policy would be decided exclusively by Khalq. Amin was inducted into the Politburo and appointed to the key post of general secretary. Karmal's idea of a united national front was abandoned in favour of a party-centred centralized authority on the Stalinist model. The powers of the provincial governors appointed in line with Parchami recommendations were transferred to provincial party secretaries, with party functionaries eventually assuming power down to district and sub-district levels. Khalqis were also appointed to organize and run movements of peasants, women and youth.

Karmal and other leading Parchamis were shunted off to live in glorified exile as ambassadors. The 27 June decisions had virtually ousted Karmal from the government. But as a party veteran he could not have given way so easily before the machinations of a relative newcomer like Amin. It appears that before leaving to take up his post in Prague, he had laid down plans to take power with the help of Parchamis who were still in place, notably Defence Minister Qadir and the Army Chief of Staff, General Shahpur Ahmedzai. The coup was planned for 4 September, on the day of the major religious festival of Eid, when soldiers and officers would be on leave and the atmosphere relaxed. A situation was to be created in which Qadir and Shahpur would intervene on the pretext of fighting in defence of the government, assume power, and form a 'United National Front' with Qadir at its head. As Anwar says, the plot was ill-considered in political terms: Qadir, who was to play the central role, was a non-Pashtun, and a Shi'ite from Herat, while the majority of the officer corps were Pashtun, Sunni and solidly pro-Khalqi.

As it turned out, the conspiracy was blown in August. The Afghan ambassador in New Delhi, a Daoud appointee who had been left in place as he had become a closet Khalqi supporter (unbeknown to Karmal who had trustingly confided his plans to him), tipped off Taraki and Amin. The 'Eid plot' played well into Amin's hands. Qadir, Shahpur and others were promptly arrested. It is said that Asadullah Sarwari, Amin's intelligence chief, made Qadir 'sing like a canary'. Amin went on a witch hunt for Parchamis, eliminating them and their sympathizers from key government and party posts and filling the jails with them.⁸ Parchami ambassadors, including Karmal and Najibullah, were recalled but did not return, absconding, it was alleged, with their embassy funds. With the defence portfolio vacant after Qadir's imprisonment, Taraki and Amin fell out openly on the question of a replacement, the former favouring the appointment of Watanjar to counterbalance Amin's influence over the officer corps. Taraki compromised by taking over the portfolio himself with Amin as his deputy.

The Afghan communists were deeply aware of the fact that they were a minority striving to bring about a revolution in a country with a small working class concentrated in Kabul and a few other cities, and an apathetic peasantry. They had gained power through a military coup and felt they had

to strike swiftly and ruthlessly before a 'counter-revolution' was able to organize itself. They tried to achieve this by three means: repression, made possible by the existence of a loyal and well-equipped army; agrarian reforms, which they thought would win the support of rural people; and a mass literacy campaign to wean the people away from the influence of the clergy and to spread the communist ideology. The arbitrary manner in which this 'revolution from above' was carried out in a rural society whose inner workings they were not aware of, or which they simply misunderstood or ignored, was a prime cause of the spate of spontaneous uprisings that took place before the Soviet invasion.

The triumphant PDPA ruled by decree, establishing Taraki as the supreme leader (Decree No. 1), setting up a government (No. 2), and abrogating the Daoud constitution (No. 3). Subsequent decrees elevated the Uzbek, Turcoman, Baluchi and Nuristani languages to the status of 'national languages' to be promoted by the media (No. 4), deprived members of the royal family of their citizenship (No. 5), cancelled land mortgages (No. 6), gave equal rights to women (No. 7), and ordered land reforms (No. 8).

Decree No. 6 was aimed at abolishing the mortgage system that went hand in hand with rural debt. Peasants owning smaller plots of land had been forced over the years, because of their lack of capital to buy seed, fertilizer and tools, to mortgage their sole asset to landlords or money lenders. Debts and mortgages incurred by peasants owning five acres or less were cancelled by the decree, and the land returned to its owners without further encumbrance. It was assumed that 81 per cent of the rural population would benefit from such a humane and equitable measure. The decree did not apply to mortgaged lands above the five-acre ceiling. But the implementation of the fiat from Kabul was doomed to failure.

In the first place, almost all land deals were contracted orally, with no written or documented records to cover the bulk of the mortgages. Secondly, the decree was implemented by inexperienced party officials, usually primary school teachers, as the PDPA lacked the organizational resources at the grassroots level to see the reforms through. Also the intruding presence of district officials, perceived by the local qawm as representatives of the much-resented central authority, precluded any meaningful cooperation with them. Thirdly, in the absence of rural credit facilities backed by the government, smallholders and landless peasants could only obtain financial help for the purchase of seed, fertilizer and other capital inputs from money-lending nomads, traders, landowners and tribal khans, often at exorbitant rates of interest. Thus when the decree was published, money lenders stopped extending loans to their impoverished clients. The overall effect of the decree was to short-circuit the traditional and informal system of rural credit that enabled the peasants to survive. One result was that those few farmers who

had managed to repossess their holdings re-mortgaged them to their old creditors. Another was that those directly hit by the decree, the landlords and the money lenders, joined hands to resist the change. They found ready allies as usual among the mullahs and ulema, often landowners themselves, who gave their blessings to the unholy cause of defending the marriage of Islam and usury that was a mark of tribal economic relations in Afghanistan.

This paper decree was complemented by another (No. 8) that set an upper limit of 15 acres on landholdings. This meant in theory that 50 per cent of the agricultural land in the country would become available for distribution to landless peasants and others with holdings under five acres. At the same time all sources of irrigation were nationalized. The Ministry of Agriculture and the newly created Land Reform Commission were entrusted with the task, traditionally assumed by the qawm, of determining the allocation of water resources, leaving village cooperatives and water supply departments to handle the local arrangements. Financial help was in theory made available from the Kabul-based Agricultural Bank set up by Zahir Shah, whose main beneficiaries in the past had only been important landowners.

Another assumption made by the PDPA was that 40 per cent of the agricultural land was not cultivated due to lack of seed, fertilizer and water, and the prevalence of 'feudal' conditions in the countryside,⁹ and that if the uncultivated land could be made productive, the country could achieve self-sufficiency in food. The land reform decrees were aimed at accomplishing this task. But the means employed were not only inadequate but showed the ignorance of the PDPA's activists of the complex rural realities.

Committees were set up in every district to implement the reforms. They were placed under the overall supervision of a provincial committee headed by the governor. Squads of city-bred youth, long on revolutionary zeal and pitifully short on knowledge and experience, would descend on villages, harangue the assembled peasants, and hand out title-deeds to the landless. Anwar cites an incident when a Party worker used derogatory language to describe a local landlord, whereupon one of the recipients reprimanded him for his lack of respect towards the khan and shot him dead. Such incidents took place across the country and attested to the PDPA's failure to appreciate the internal dynamics of the rural communities they were trying to change.¹⁰

Olivier Roy advances the hypothesis that the agrarian reforms were intended to break down the traditional socio-economic structures and not to create a system of modest individual landholdings backed up by an efficient system of rural credit that would have made them economically viable:

Later on the government planned to set up cooperatives which would group small farmers who had benefited from the land reforms, and who would have now come to realise that it was impossible for them to make a living from their farms by themselves. In support of this view we might add that the official document which

published the article dealing with the establishment of agricultural cooperatives appeared in September 1978, that is to say before Decree 8. The agrarian reform may not have been a collectivist reform, but it seems that it was worked out with the clear intention that it should be the first stage on the route to a collectivist society of the future.¹¹

The natural resistance of landlords to the agricultural reforms had a further dimension in that they counted among their ranks some of the country's most influential political, social and even religious leaders, such as the heads of the Mujaddidi and Gailani clans. Private property is considered sacrosanct in Islam, and the landlords found natural allies in the religious establishment of the mullahs and the ulema in a symbiotic relationship. As a Russian historian cited by Anwar states:

It is important to note that Muslim theologians were the first to form into a privileged estate of the Pashtun society, and it was they who made the first breach in the system of agrarian relationships based on common ownership ... *seri* - a land benefice granted to the clergy can and must be regarded as the initial form of feudal land tenure.

This situation prevailed because *seri* lands once granted were never revoked. To cultivate them the mullah had recourse to members of other tribes who either sought refuge in the *qawm* or who had been vanquished in tribal conflicts, and as such were outsiders having no social status in the host tribe and easily exploitable as landless labourers.

These decrees, carried out without adequate preparation and with the hasty zeal of doctrinaire Marxist reformers, resulted in a disastrous drop in agricultural production. In an average year Afghanistan imported some 200,000 tonnes of wheat to offset the deficit in domestic production. The unrest in the countryside and the spreading civil strife soon caused a steep drop in domestic production. In 1979 some 350,000 tonnes of wheat had to be imported. In the spring of 1980, after the Soviet invasion, Babrak Karmal informed the country that out of a total cultivable area of 9.5 million acres, only 8.75 million acres had been cropped, reducing the average annual yield from 6.5 million tonnes to 5.9 million tonnes. There were similar falls in the production of other food crops, as well as cash crops like cotton, which registered a drop of 30 per cent.

Another source of tension was the implementation of the literacy campaign throughout the country: children and adults, young and old, had to learn to read and write within one year. The programme called for 18,500 teachers to be sent into the countryside, 16,000 of whom would be volunteers. The response of the rural people to the campaign was mixed. Previous regimes had spared no effort in bringing education to the countryside by establishing village schools, encouraging villagers to participate in the con-

struction of the school buildings, with the government taking responsibility for the payment of teachers' salaries. The opportunity to learn was welcomed and teachers enjoyed a certain esteem as long as they did not overturn tradition. The PDPA's campaign came to be resented for a number of reasons: the teachers employed in the campaign were usually student volunteers supportive of the regime but who came from outside the qawm, often from Kabul and other cities, and who behaved in an authoritarian and arrogant manner; village elders and other old men who were forced to attend the courses were profoundly humiliated; the texts used had a Marxist slant that disturbed the devout, for one of the aims of the campaign was political indoctrination. But what sparked open resistance leading to revolt was the mixing of the sexes in the literacy classes, conducted mainly by adult males and adolescents from the cities because of the dearth of female teachers. Roy observes that there was a close correlation between the regions targeted in the literacy campaign and those where uprisings took place. By the winter of 1979-80, the literacy campaign had come to a halt in the countryside and now only affected the urban areas that were firmly in the grip of the regime.

Decree No. 7 related to the rights of women: child marriages were declared illegal, the minimum marriageable age for boys was set at 18 years, and for girls at 16, and the mutual consent of the bride and groom was declared essential. The aspect of the decree that provoked the most controversy was the upper limit of 300 afghanis placed on the *haq mehr*, or money payable to the wife in case of dissolution of the marriage. Generally, the bride-price payable by the groom's family was negotiated in advance by the two parties, the actual sum arrived at depending on the economic and social standing of the families. The provision of freedom of choice came up against other traditional practices such as the 'barter' arrangements whereby a daughter would be married to a brother's son, with a view not only to settling them but to keeping property within the extended family. Marriages were also used among the more influential classes to forge strategic alliances. It was also not unusual for marriage contracts to be negotiated when the prospective bride and groom were no more than infants. The decree was welcomed in more advanced urban circles where young people were able to marry the partners of their choice for the first time in Afghan history. But it was perceived as a frontal attack on tradition by the backward and unlettered people of rural Afghanistan.¹²

Repression during the Taraki-Amin period was at first selective, aimed at the complete elimination of certain social categories that were thought to be potential counter-revolutionaries. In the towns the victims were drawn from the higher ranks of the clergy, intellectuals, liberals and Maoists. In the countryside the targeted victims were drawn from among the clergy, leaders of the Sufi orders and people of influence in the local communities. Promi-

ment among those executed were the prestigious head of the Naqshbandiya Sufi order, the Hazrat of Shor Bazar, and all male members of his Mujaddidi family present in Kabul. Some 200 Islamic student militants, who had been arrested by Daoud and had remained in the Pul-i-Charki prison without trial since 1975, were executed in a single night in June 1979. In February 1980 the government put in place by the Soviets admitted that 12,000 people had 'officially' died, meaning that they had disappeared. The number of those executed or missing in the countryside was uncountable: Roy estimates that in all some 50,000 to 100,000 people disappeared.

Another kind of repression was in response to spontaneous uprisings that began as local reactions to heavy-handed attempts by governmental authorities and their militant agents to impose their land reform and literacy programmes, or to make arrests. The revolts typically took the form of an attack led by religious leaders, village headmen and elders on a government post, with heavy casualties on both sides. If the attack was successful, the communist militants were executed, and non-communist soldiers and officials were allowed to leave. Then the revolt would spread to surrounding areas where ethnic affiliation or tribal solidarity operated, and stop when the frontier of the ethnic or tribal territory was reached. The earliest such revolt took place in Nuristan in July 1978. Another successful revolt took place in the Shi'ite Hazarajat in December 1978. Both these regions remained autonomous for the duration of the civil war. Generally speaking the uprisings occurred in non-Pashtun or in detribalized Pashtun zones.

Those who remained passive or neutral during these uprisings or even collaborated actively with the Khalqis were drawn from the urban lower middle class of officials and employees dependent on the state, modern in their outlook, and cut off from their roots in the countryside. Many high officials retained their positions even as real power passed into the hands of young and incompetent militants of the PDPA and their Soviet advisers. The regime was even able to draw support and recruit militias from among those peasants who had benefited from the land distribution programme at the expense of rival tribes or clans. Roy states that 'as a general rule, zones which had a strong mixture of uprooted tribal elements, migrants of all kinds, and a hotch-potch of ethnic groups were more subject to government influence (which was able to play upon the rivalries and frustrations plaguing subordinate groups) than zones that were homogenous from an ethnic or a tribal point of view.' Even in the latter zones, Ghilzai Pashtun tribal solidarity could sometimes prevail over other factors as the Khalqi leadership was Ghilzai, the first to take power in Afghanistan since the Durrani ascendancy began in the second half of the eighteenth century.

It took only seven feverish months in 1978 for the PDPA's Khalqi faction to get rid of Karmal and his Parchamis and initiate their reforms. But the

regime was vulnerable on many fronts. In addition to financial difficulties, the land reforms did not have the hoped-for result of an exploited and impoverished peasant population rallying gratefully and enthusiastically to the cause of revolution. The reforms, on the other hand, provoked unprecedented tensions in the countryside. The pressure brought on them forced many tribal chiefs and their followers to move into Pakistan where they were received with open arms by the unpopular Zia ul-Haq regime, eager for an anti-communist cause to support and the means to consolidate its rule with international assistance. Every arriving Afghan was given a daily stipend of four rupees – more than the average income of an Afghan peasant. By the end of 1978 some 80,000 Afghans had reached Pakistan according to government figures. Pakistan also claimed to have spent the equivalent of \$145 million on 'humanitarian assistance' to the Afghan refugees. In the meantime the forces of opposition were rallying in Pakistan: eight training camps were established in the North West Frontier Province to turn simple Afghan refugees into guerrilla fighters.

In December 1978 Taraki and Amin flew to Moscow to conclude a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. To most observers it seemed a routine renewal of the 1921 treaty signed by King Amanullah. But there was a new provision that called for Soviet military assistance if needed, subject to two amendments introduced personally by Amin that augured his future independent stance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and which was to bring about his downfall: first, any Soviet troops sent for would serve under Afghan officers, and second, their eventual return would be decided by the host government. Large numbers of Soviet military and civilian advisers were already present in the country before the new treaty was concluded. Its signature was also a signal to the US and its Pakistani ally that their support of counter-revolutionary forces would bring in the Red Army.

But Pakistan's Zia ul-Haq, fired by his Islamic and anti-communist zeal, was not to be deterred. In January 1979 a first contingent of some 5000 insurrectionists under the banner of Gullbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizbi-i-Islami entered Kunar province, attacked Asadabad, its principal town, and captured a strategically located government fort. Most ominously its success was due to the defection of the local army brigade led by Abdur Rauf, who had previously joined the Khalqis but now became a leading mujahideen commander. In February the abduction of the US ambassador by terrorists belonging to Badakhshi's Sitm-e-Melli group, who sought the release of their imprisoned leaders, provoked US hostility. Ambassador Dubs was killed when Amin's troops stormed the hotel room where he was being kept. On 15 March there was a major uprising in Herat involving Afghan Shi'ite seasonal workers who had returned in large numbers after the fall of the Shah. The 17th Army Division stationed there virtually collapsed. An artillery regiment and an

infantry regiment defected to the rebels. One of their commanders, Ismail Khan, led a successful attack on what was left of the garrison, and was to emerge later, in alignment with the Jamiat, as one of the most effective commanders of the mujahideen. The rebellion was crushed by paratroopers from Kandahar, at a cost of 25,000 lives. In April major attacks were mounted in Jalalabad, in Paktia province, and in Gardez, by mujahideen organized from Pakistan by Sayyed Ahmad Gailani and Mujaddidi. Fighting raged on till June and was quelled when the government brought into play for the first time helicopter gunships supplied by the Soviets. On 23 June there were violent anti-government demonstrations staged in Kabul by Shi'ite Hazaras.

Between March and July 1979 disagreements between Taraki and Amin came to a head. A bone of contention was the unresolved issue of the defence portfolio held by Taraki, but effectively under the control of Amin, his deputy. Despite Amin's manoeuvring, Taraki's favourite, General Aslam Watanjar, was appointed to the post. Amin's position was weak, as the failed army commanders in Asadabad and Herat had been his appointees. But Amin succeeded in having his brother-in-law elevated to chief of staff, while the head of the army's powerful political department was also an Amin man. At a meeting of the Politburo on 28 July, Amin overtly held Taraki responsible for the government's failures through his proneness to unilateral decision making, and proposed 'a collective leadership and collective decisions'. With Amin's faction now commanding a majority, the Defence Ministry was once more returned to Taraki's charge, with Amin as his deputy. Watanjar was shunted back to the Interior Ministry; the Foreign Ministry and the Deputy Premiership was passed on to an Amin loyalist, Akbar Shah Wali; and the Tribal Affairs Ministry to Mazdooriyar, with Amin-leaning deputies appointed to the Foreign and Interior Ministries. Other key appointments reduced Taraki to a mere figurehead, with Amin controlling the levers of power in the government and in the army. An Amin loyalist, Major Daud Arun, was appointed to head the presidential guard. Amin was now poised for a final showdown with Taraki when the opportunity arose.

By August the Khalqi PDPA had polarized into Taraki and Amin factions, the former led by Watanjar, Ghulabzoi, Mazdooriyar and Asadullah Sarwari, formerly an assiduous Amin supporter who, as intelligence chief, had hounded the Parchamis and had now defected to the Taraki cause.¹³ They came to be known as the 'gang of four'. In August, according to Mrs Taraki, Taraki chided Amin by saying: 'We are a Marxist Party, but people accuse us of nepotism. You have appointed Abdullah Amin [who was not even a member of the Party] Supervisory Governor of the four northern provinces, and your nephew has been made Deputy Foreign Minister.' Amin replied angrily: 'So, should I murder my family?'

On 4 September Taraki left for Havana by way of Moscow for a summit meeting of 'non-aligned nations' including Pakistan. Two days before Taraki's departure, Sarwari confided to the Soviet adviser attached to his Department of Intelligence that 'it is my information that Amin has decided to kill Taraki and take over power'. None of the 'gang of four' slept at his own house thereafter, out of fear that Amin might have them killed. On 7 September Sarwari telephoned Taraki in Havana to tell him that 'Amin is planning to either arrest us or have us all killed so that he can take over the government before your return'. This call may have prompted Taraki to arrange for a secret meeting with Brezhnev during a stop-over at Moscow airport on his return journey from Havana on 12 September. Babrak Karmal may also have been present. At the prompting of the Soviet foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, it was decided that Amin should be sent into diplomatic exile and a 'national democratic' government be formed, with Karmal as prime minister and half the cabinet nominated from outside the PDPA.

The events of the next three days, as narrated by Anwar citing first-hand sources, can only be described as a bizarre combination of cloak-and-dagger politics taking place in a cowboys-and-Indians scenario, with ambushes planned by Sarwari, and with Amin keeping a step ahead, thanks to his spies at every level. In the end, as in a western, Taraki and his Indians lost out. The 'Great Leader' himself became a prisoner in his palace. On 15 September Amin announced to the Central Committee that Taraki had tendered his resignation on grounds of ill health. The chief conspirators against Amin - Sarwari, Watanjar and Ghulabzoi - sought refuge in the Soviet embassy. The precise circumstances of Taraki's death on 8 or 9 October - whether he was hanged in prison or suffocated with a pillow at the Arg palace - have not been elucidated.¹⁴

During Amin's 100 days in power, the dice were already cast against him. Three-quarters of the country was in a state of rebellion. In September 1979 the powerful Jadran tribe in Paktia province rose in revolt. The government launched a full-scale military operation that ended in a decisive defeat. Because of widespread desertions and defections, the effective army had already been reduced to a third or less of its full complement of 100,000 before the coup d'état. Sixty out of 62 generals had been relieved of their commands after the April 1978 communist putsch and replaced by PDPA supporters from the ranks of captains and majors. The morale of the Afghan armed forces, the mainstay of the regime, was low, as a contemporary Soviet Defence Ministry evaluation revealed.

In the autumn of 1979, after his overthrow of Taraki, Amin must have realized that his position was vulnerable: the country was in a ferment, his army in disarray, and he could not nurture the illusion that Pakistan would withdraw its support of the Peshawar-based Islamic opposition parties, al-

though the material support was very minimal at this stage, compared to the levels that were to be reached after the Soviet invasion. Nevertheless, in addition to some conciliatory gestures on the domestic front, Amin began to make friendly overtures to Pakistan. He was considering a trade-off: Afghan acceptance of the Durand Line as an international frontier in return for an end to Pakistani support of the regime's enemies. He extended an invitation to Zia ul-Haq to send his foreign minister, Agha Shahi, to Kabul. He did receive a positive response from Zia but the scheduled visit in December was called off at the last moment.

At the same time, Amin initiated some overtures to the US with whom relations had soured since the Dubs episode and the suspension of US assistance programmes. In an interview given by Amin to correspondents from two leading US newspapers in October, he invited the US to study the Afghan situation 'in a realistic manner' and 'provide us with more assistance'. It was probably not material assistance that he meant as he was getting enough of that from the USSR. Washington was aware of the growing tensions between Amin and Moscow. As early as July 1979 the US chargé d'affaires was told by the East German ambassador in Kabul that Moscow considered 'the key ingredient' in a political solution to the regime's problems to be 'the departure of Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin'.¹⁵ Some US diplomatic contacts with Amin had taken place in the autumn but nothing had come of them. Amin was in a Catch 22 situation: his complete dependence on Soviet support could not be reconciled with a manifest desire to follow an independent course in foreign policy. Moscow on its part may have come to perceive in Amin an independent-minded nationalist, a fledgling Tito who would not be Moscow's puppet. The murder of the less ambiguously pro-Soviet Taraki was the last straw.

CHAPTER 7

Prelude to the Soviet Invasion

Soviet foreign policy since the Bolshevik Revolution had been dominated by a deep fear of military encirclement. International considerations therefore certainly played a part in the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan. The break with Mao Tse Tung's China, the successive confrontations with China on border questions, and the ideological rivalry with this country had made the USSR realize that it had a formidable and hostile neighbour on its eastern frontiers. The rapidly improving relations between China and the United States in the late 1970s, after President Nixon's visit and the resumption of diplomatic ties, stirred up fears of an eventual Beijing-Washington axis directed at the Soviet Union. Another cause of concern was the regional instability brought about by the fall of the Shah in Iran. In November 1979 US embassy staff in Tehran had been taken hostage by militant students, and there were reports of an American naval build-up in the Persian Gulf during the ongoing crisis and the creation of a rapid deployment force to police south-west Asia after the US had lost all its Iranian facilities. Was Washington planning to seek a more permanent alternative to the military facilities that Iran had previously provided? As Brezhnev told *Pravda* after the Soviet invasion, there had been 'a real threat that Afghanistan would lose its independence and be turned into an imperialist military bridgehead on our southern border'.¹ A more immediate cause for concern was the tacit US backing, through its Pakistani and Saudi allies, of the Peshawar-based Afghan Islamist parties. The establishment in Iran of a radically Islamic regime that was as stridently anti-communist as it was anti-American, as well as the prospect of an Islamist Afghanistan, could have serious repercussions in the contiguous Soviet republics of Central Asia where Muslim revivalist movements were gaining influence.

In the 1970s the Cold War had turned into a worldwide struggle. After the ill-fated Prague Spring of 1968 and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Brezhnev promulgated his doctrine that any state that had once 'turned' socialist would never be permitted to revert to its original form of government or indeed to any other. This doctrine applied particularly to Eastern Europe, which constituted the USSR's security shield in the west. But it could also hold true by extension to countries in other regions where the

Soviet Union had come to acquire a dominant influence. There were many examples of this influence. In Yemen in 1970 the former British colony of Aden turned into a people's democratic republic with close ties to the USSR, and the Portuguese transfer of power in Angola and Mozambique in 1975 led to the constitution of the Marxist-style and Soviet-backed MPLA and Frelimo governments respectively. The Soviet Union's Cuban proxies intervened directly in the ensuing civil wars in both these countries. In Somalia the Siad Barre regime, in power since 1970, developed pretensions of effecting a socialist transformation with Soviet assistance. The strategic port of Berbera was handed over to the Soviets who turned it into a major warm-water naval base that gave them access to the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. In Ethiopia the ousting of Haile Selassie in 1974 led to the emergence in 1976–77, with Soviet support, of the Marxist-style Dergue regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. In Indochina the final debacle of the South Vietnamese army and government that had been shored up for so many years by the United States at a massive cost in lives and material, and the spectacular entry of North Vietnamese troops into Saigon in April 1975, were closely followed by the seizure of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge guerrillas, and the proclamation of the communist Lao People's Democratic Republic in Vientiane. Only in Egypt did the Soviets suffer a major reversal when Anwar Sadat repudiated them in favour of an alliance with the US, expelling Soviet advisers and technicians en masse, in return for massive doses of US economic and military aid.

The Brezhnev doctrine was to be countered by the Reagan doctrine that no communist de facto conquests should or would go unchallenged. It would insist on combating and rolling back the communist acquisitions and thrusts wherever they occurred, not only in America's own backyard, as in Nicaragua and El Salvador, but also in Africa and elsewhere. Reagan's appointee to head the CIA from 1981 to 1987, William J. Casey, became a most active 'Cold Warrior', using fair means or foul to counter Soviet advances. But this is to anticipate events.

At the height of the insurrection in Herat, a full meeting of the Soviet Politburo was convened on 17–19 March 1979 to discuss 'the deterioration of conditions in Afghanistan and possible response from our side'.² Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, in his introductory briefing, said that the Afghan army division stationed in Herat had 'essentially collapsed', with two entire regiments going over to the insurgents. Reportedly, bands of saboteurs and terrorists trained in Iran and Pakistan had joined forces with domestic counter-revolutionaries, especially fanatics linked to religious figures, and were committing atrocities. The situation was confused. He had had a telephone conversation with Hafizullah Amin who had not expressed 'the slightest alarm'; on the contrary, he had said 'with Olympian tranquillity' that

'the situation was not all that complicated, the army was in control, and so forth'. But later he had received news that Taraki had summoned the chief Soviet military adviser in Kabul, General Gorelov, and the *chargé d'affaires*, Alexeev, to request urgent help in the form of military equipment, ammunition and food rations, adding, 'almost in passing', that Soviet 'air and ground support' would be required. He understood this to mean the deployment of ground and air forces into Afghanistan.³ But before the multiple implications of such a measure were discussed, the Politburo agreed with Gromyko: 'We must proceed from a fundamental proposition in considering aid to Afghanistan, namely: under no circumstances may we lose Afghanistan.'

Defence Minister Ustinov stated that his forces would be ready for deployment 'within three days': sending the 105th Airborne Division into Afghanistan 'in the course of a single day', dispatching an infantry motorized regiment into Kabul, and placing two motorized divisions on the border. But KGB chief Yuri Andropov came out strongly against the use of Soviet forces:

We must consider very very seriously the question of whose cause we will be supporting if we deploy forces into Afghanistan. It's completely clear to us that Afghanistan is not ready at this time to resolve all of the issues it faces through socialism. The economy is backward, the Islamic religion predominates, and nearly all of the rural population is illiterate. We know about Lenin's teaching about a revolutionary situation. Whatever situation we are talking about in Afghanistan, it is not that type of situation. Therefore, I believe that we can suppress a revolution in Afghanistan only with the aid of our bayonets, and that is for us completely inadmissible.

Andropov's view was supported by Gromyko who, after spelling out the unacceptable international implications, emphasized that the sending of troops had no legal justification: 'According to the UN Charter a country can appeal for assistance, and we could send troops, in case it is subject to external aggression. Afghanistan has not been subject to any aggression. This is its internal affair, a revolutionary internal conflict, a battle of one group of the population against another. Incidentally, the Afghans haven't officially addressed us on bringing troops.' The Politburo also agreed to Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin's proposal to invite Taraki to Tashkent or Moscow and inform him that the USSR would support him 'with all means and measures' but would 'not deploy troops'.

Chairman Leonid Brezhnev, attending the 19 March session in person, stated that 'the Politburo had correctly determined that the time is not right for us to become entangled' in the war in Afghanistan. He had, however, authorized all the measures proposed by the Politburo at its two previous sessions. These were:

- the immediate delivery of military equipment and supplies, including the waiver of the usual charge of 25 per cent of cost, payable on the basis of a ten-year loan at 2 per cent interest, as imposed on such deliveries since January 1979
- a gift of 100,000 tonnes of wheat
- a rise in the price of gas purchased by the USSR from 15 to 25 roubles per thousand cubic centimetres, to defray the Kabul government's increased expenditure
- the redeployment of two Soviet divisions to the Afghan border
- the sending of some 500 more Soviet military and civilian advisers and specialists, in addition to the 550 who were already present in Afghanistan; according to previous arrangements, the advisers were sent at Soviet expense, but the provision of living quarters, transport and medical services was the responsibility of the Afghan side
- the invitation for Taraki to meet at Tashkent or Moscow.

The Soviet position was conveyed personally to Taraki by Kosygin, Gromyko, Ustinov and Boris Ponomarev at a meeting in Moscow on 20 March. According to their written report to the Politburo, Kosygin made clear to Taraki that the friendship between the USSR and Afghanistan was 'not conditional. ... We will continue to give assistance in the fight against all enemies now and against those who may clash in the future.' Referring to the Vietnamese example, Kosygin said: 'No one can accuse the Vietnamese of using foreign troops to deal with their problem.' They had received word that day that mutinous sections of the 17th Division in Herat had been subdued by paratroopers and tanks sent from Kandahar. In Herat 'it seemed that all would fall apart, but when you really took charge of the matter, you were able to seize control of the situation'. Kosygin reiterated that the USSR would render every type of assistance 'short of deploying Soviet troops on Afghan soil which will invite all sorts of international complications', engendering 'conflict not only with imperialist countries but one's own people'. He added that the most effective support would be through exercising Soviet political influence on neighbouring countries. Letters had been sent that day to Iran and Pakistan requesting them 'not to meddle in the affairs of Afghanistan'.

Taraki replied in a somewhat rambling way that emerging problems should be dealt with through political means and that military actions should be 'auxiliary in nature'. Regarding the events in Herat, he put the blame on 'aristocrats and feudalists' who were 'class enemies'. He said that the PDPA's land reforms had secured the authority of the government among the Afghan people, and that anti-Khomeini demonstrations in Herat and elsewhere protesting against the Iranian role in Herat had convinced him that the regime's internal enemies 'were not so numerous'. He referred vaguely to

Pakistani and Iranian infiltrators 'dressed in Afghan army uniforms'. In reply to a question from Kosygin, referring to news from Iran that all foreign experts and workers had to leave the country in June–July, Taraki mentioned a figure of 'no less than 200,000' Afghans who had moved to work in Iran under Daoud or even earlier; some of them, he said, may come back as guerrillas.

The Soviet side reiterated its promise of maximum political support and extensive assistance in the line of military and other shipments. In response to Taraki's further request for armoured helicopters, Ustinov undertook to deliver six MI-24s in June–July and six others in the last quarter of 1979. The Soviets would also send maintenance specialists 'but not battle crews'. Taraki retorted, 'Why not pilots and tank operators from socialist countries?' He also requested a 1000-watt transmitter for Radio Kabul.

At the Politburo session of 22 March, Brezhnev reported on his private meeting with Taraki. He had made it clear that 'the ideo-political cohesion of the PDPA was of primary significance in pursuing political work among the masses', and that 'primarily political and economic means' should be employed to broaden its base of support, 'not repression'. He had also made it clear to Taraki that the introduction of Soviet military forces would be 'inexpedient ... in the current situation. This could only play into the hands of our common enemy.' Two months later the Soviet position remained unchanged. A Politburo meeting on 24 May confirmed the dispatch of military equipment costing 53 million roubles;⁴ it had also been explained to Taraki again that there was no question of providing helicopters and transport planes with Soviet crews, or of sending paratroopers to Kabul.

Contrary to what was bruited about in the international media at the time, and later in the extensive literature that has grown up around the subject, the Soviet leadership was not at all eager to send their armed forces into Afghanistan. The Politburo's decisions were guided by the recommendations of a task force, or Special Commission (comprising Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov and Ponomarev), appointed to monitor developments in Afghanistan. Decisions were also taken on a collegial basis and endorsed by Brezhnev. The archival records reveal the leadership's extreme circumspection and reserve in the face of persistent demands by Taraki and Amin for an active Soviet role. There is a report from Gorelov on a meeting on 14 April when Amin requested the dispatch to Kabul of 15 to 20 helicopters with ammunition and 'Soviet crews ... to be used eventually against bands of terrorists and infiltrators from Pakistan'. The transcript ends with a terse instruction from the Soviet Chief of Staff, Marshal N.V. Ogarkov: 'This shall not be done'. Again in July, Taraki and Amin returned to the issue, demanding in particular the introduction of two Soviet divisions 'in the event of emergency circumstances ... at the request of the legal government of Af-

ghanistan'. Again they were told, 'the USSR cannot do this'. On 21 July, when Amin requested eight to ten helicopters 'with Soviet crews', Ambassador Puzanov clearly repeated the Soviet policy line: 'the Soviet side cannot embark on the participation of Soviet personnel in combat operations'.

But the policy of non-intervention did not preclude some contingency planning in line with Brezhnev's 19 March directives, notably the positioning of two Soviet divisions on the Afghan border. On 28 June a joint report to the Central Committee of the CPSU by the Politburo's four-member Special Commission referred to the 'objective' and 'subjective' weaknesses in the situation of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), concluding that 'the main support of the Afghan government in the struggle with the counter-revolution continues to be the army'. It was therefore considered expedient to send to Afghanistan an experienced general and a group of officers to work directly among the troops, in the divisions and regiments, and to:

provide for the security and defence for the Soviet air squadrons at the Bagram field, send to the DRA, with the agreement of the Afghan side, a parachute battalion disguised in the uniform (overalls) of an aviation technical maintenance team. For the defence of the Soviet Embassy, send to Kabul a special detachment of the KGB USSR (125-150 men), disguised as Embassy service personnel. At the beginning of August, ... send to the DRA (to the Bagram airfield) a special detachment of the GRU of the General Staff to be used in the event of a sharp aggravation of the situation for the security and defence of particularly important installations.⁵

A transcript of 5 November reports on the mission led by Deputy Defence Minister General I.G. Pavlovsky (17 August to 22 October) to review the state of the Afghan armed forces and the organization and methods of their combat operations against the rebels, to provide for on-site assistance to the Afghan commanders, and to prepare recommendations for the further strengthening of their combat capabilities. The mission was able to render some practical short-term assistance 'so that the Afghan armed forces, instead of relying on passive defence and faltering operations by small units, were able to launch coordinated and active operations against the rebels'. This, according to the mission's report, enabled them 'to gain the initiative and to destroy the most dangerous forces of counter-revolution in the provinces of Paktia, Ghazni, Parvan, Bamian and several other areas'. But the mission concluded that the army's combat morale, discipline and willingness to act were still low. Military regulations that were codified with Soviet help had had no impact on the practical life of the soldiers. 'The commanders, staffs, political organs, and party organizations do not always coordinate their work in resolving tasks among the troops. Staffs at all levels, including the General Staff, have still not become a central directing organ in the daily life of large

and small units and in the troops' combat activity.' The report's conclusions were communicated to Amin who expressed the hope that Soviet military advisers would be assigned to every battalion.

It is clear that the subsequent murder of Taraki, the Pavlovsky report, and Amin's attempts to reorient Afghan foreign policy during his 100 days in power caused a gradual shift in Soviet thinking and strategy that was compatible with the bottom-line decision adopted at the March 1979 sessions of the Politburo: 'under no circumstances may we lose Afghanistan'.

In the meantime there were some last-ditch attempts to save the situation. Before Taraki's deposition and murder, a Politburo directive of 13 September instructed the Soviet ambassador in Kabul to meet Taraki and Amin and express the hope that 'they must come together and act in concord from a position of unanimity in the name of saving the revolution'. But, as Puzanov was advised, 'we cannot take it upon ourselves to arrest Amin with our own battalion force, since this would be a direct interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan (and) would have far-reaching consequences. Indeed, this is practically unfeasible.' After Amin's coup, Gromyko communicated to the Soviet representatives in Kabul a Politburo decision of 15 September to continue to deal with Amin but to restrain him from repressing Taraki and his followers.

As Brezhnev commented in a transcript dated 20 September: 'Events developed so swiftly in Afghanistan that essentially there was little opportunity to somehow interfere in them. Right now our mission is to determine our further actions, so as to preserve our position in Afghanistan and to secure our influence there.' What these 'further actions' amounted to, as we know, was a full-scale armed intervention in Afghanistan.

A transcript of 3 November refers to a conversation that Puzanov had with Amin, informing him of the Soviet leadership's readiness to receive him in Moscow and expressing their satisfaction over the measures he was taking in the area of party and state building. On 6 December a new ambassador to Kabul, F.A. Tabeev, renewed Moscow's invitation to Amin. On the same day, there was a Politburo decision to send to the DRA a special detachment, 'in response to Amin's request for a motorized rifle battalion to defend his residence'. It was to be drawn from 'the GRV of the General Staff which has been prepared for these goals, with a complement of some 500 men in uniforms that do not reveal their belonging to the armed forces of the USSR and to be airdropped by military transport aircraft'.

But a personal memorandum from Andropov to Brezhnev in early December (undated) speaks of 'the undesirable turn of events' for the USSR after the murder of Taraki: the ongoing destruction of the army and government apparatus as a result of mass repressions carried out by Amin, and 'alarming information' about Amin's 'secret activities forewarning of a possi-

ble political shift to the West'. It speaks further of contacts made by the émigrés Karmal and Sarwari 'informing us that they have worked out a plan for opposing Amin and creating new party and state organs, and raising the question of possible assistance, including military assistance, in case of need'. And Andropov ends:

We have two battalions stationed in Kabul and there is the capability of rendering this assistance. It appears that this is entirely sufficient for a successful operation. But, as a precautionary measure in the event of unforeseen complications, it would be wise to have a military group close to the border. In case of the deployment of military forces we could at the same time decide various questions pertaining to the liquidation of gangs. The implementation of the given operation would allow us to decide the question of defending the gains of the April revolution, establishing Leninist principles in the party and state leadership of Afghanistan, and securing our positions in this country.

The groundwork for a Soviet military intervention and the positioning of a compliant post-Amin regime had thus been prepared. But the decision relating to the military intervention came very late in the day and recorded in a handwritten note dated 12 December.

The transcript of a document dated 31 December 1979, signed by the four members of the Special Commission and addressed to the Central Committee of the CPSU, is a sort of apology for the invasion that began on 27-28 December. It refers to 'the regime of personal dictatorship' that Amin had been trying to establish since September with the objective of liquidating the party: 'more than 600 members of the PDPA, military personnel and other persons suspected of anti-Amin sentiments were executed without trial or investigation'. It speaks of Amin's smear campaigns against the Soviet Union, his hampering of the activities of Soviet personnel in the country and of his efforts to mend relations with the United States, as part of 'a more balanced foreign policy strategy'.

Expressing alarm over the fate of the revolution and the independence of the country, and reacting keenly to the rise of anti-Amin sentiments in Afghanistan, Karmal Babrak and Asadullah Sarwari, both living abroad as émigrés, have undertaken to unite all anti-Amin groups in the country and abroad, in order to save the motherland and the revolution. In addition the currently underground group "Parcham", under the leadership of an illegal CC, has carried out significant work to rally all progressive forces, including Taraki supporters from the former "Khalq" group. ...

In this extremely difficult situation, which has threatened the gains of the April revolution and the interests of maintaining our national security, it has become necessary to render additional military assistance to Afghanistan, specially since such requests had been made by previous administrations in DRA. In accordance

with the provisions of the Soviet-Afghan treaty of 1978, a decision has been made to send the necessary contingent of the Soviet Army to Afghanistan.

It appears from Rajah Anwar's account of his conversations with Amin's widow in the Pul-i-Charki prison that the initial Soviet plan was to physically incapacitate Amin by having his food doctored by his Russian cook, and have him transferred in an unconscious state to a Soviet medical facility before he was tried for Taraki's murder or exiled. There are also other versions of the story. But somehow the plans went awry, and KGB commandos, or the Spetznaz, or both, went into action against Amin's residence and killed him in the operation.⁶

As was to be expected, the condemnation of the Soviet invasion was worldwide. The United Nations General Assembly, convened in a special session in January 1980, tabled a resolution adopted by 104 votes, with 48 negative votes and abstentions, that called for an immediate withdrawal of (unnamed) 'foreign troops' from Afghanistan. President Carter characterized the aggression as 'the greatest threat to peace since World War II' - something of a hyperbole if one takes into consideration the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Carter also announced a package of sanctions, including the non-ratification of the SALT II non-proliferation treaty, a ban of exports of wheat and high technology to the USSR, and a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics. It was the end of a long period of détente that had incidentally proved very profitable for East-West trade, particularly the exports of wheat from countries like Canada and Argentina or of high technology from West Germany and France: hence the somewhat lukewarm response of some members of the Western alliance on the issue of sweeping sanctions.

A meeting of the Politburo called on 27 January 1980 discussed 'the further measures to be taken to provide for the national interests of the USSR in relation to the events in Afghanistan'. These were international damage control measures, to mobilize support where possible for Soviet actions, or at least to blunt the effects of hostile acts and propaganda inspired or directed by the United States. Soviet diplomacy was to operate on a wide variety of fronts: calling on the support of the Non-Aligned Movement (using Cuba and Vietnam) and working-class and progressive parties everywhere; exploiting the latent differences within NATO on the question of sanctions (the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Turkey); putting spokes in the wheel of the ongoing rapprochement between Washington and Beijing; preserving the anti-imperialist, primarily anti-American, elements in the foreign policy of Iran, 'insofar as the continuation of the crisis in Iran-American relations limits the possibilities of the Khomeini regime to inspire anti-government uprisings on Moslem grounds in Afghanistan'; and actively blocking Washington's 'policy of knocking together a united front of the

West and certain Moslem countries, and of reorienting Islamic fanaticism on an anti-Soviet course'.

There are two interesting lines of approach in this document. First, it expressed caution as regards relations with the United States: 'Despite the fact that Washington will in the future continue to initiate an anti-Soviet campaign and will strive to impart a coordinated character to the actions of its allies, to realize our countermeasures proceeding from the inexpedience of complicating the entire complex of multi-level relations between the Soviet Union and the USA.' Second, the Politburo set out to contradict the correlation that British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was trying to draw between the change in the Afghan leadership and the deployment of Soviet contingents in Afghanistan: 'There is no relationship here; it is purely coincidental. ... [It is important that] while conducting foreign policy and propagandistic measures, to use even more widely the thesis that the Soviet Union's provision of military assistance to Afghanistan cannot be viewed in isolation from the USA's provocative efforts, which have already been undertaken over the course of a long time, to achieve unilateral military advantages in regions which are strategically important to the USSR.'

This was also the substance of the briefing given by Gromyko in Moscow to the new Afghan foreign minister, Shah Mohamed Dost, on 4 January 1980. In the guise of 'sharing his thoughts about the current situation in the Security Council' as well as 'the character of your appearance at the forthcoming session', Gromyko was in fact giving instructions to Dost, who was advised: 'You have every reason to be the accuser - not the accused.' He was also informed that a senior Soviet official, V.S Safronchuk, was being sent to New York 'to assist you as you have requested earlier'. But officially he was going there in the capacity of a member of the Soviet delegation to the United Nations. Dost was cautioned to exercise discretion in his meetings with Safronchuk, to be held preferably in Soviet premises such as the consulate-general. And so the regime in Kabul became the creature of a foreign power for the first time since Amir Abdur Rahman had begun laying the foundations of a neutral and independent Afghan state 100 years earlier.

Foreign minister Dost had told Gromyko that at meetings of the Afghan Politburo, 'Babrak continuously stressed the necessity to pay attention carefully to the friendly and timely advice and wishes coming from the Soviet leaders'. In his conversations with President Karmal and other members of the new Afghan leadership during his visit to Kabul at the beginning of February, Andropov laid down the broad lines of the domestic policies they were to follow. He emphasized the need for developing genuine party unity within a broad-based PDPA consisting of both Parcham and Khalqi elements; strengthening relations between the PDPA and government with the masses, including the tribes and moderate religious leaders; instituting normal eco-

conomic life in the country; and heightening the military readiness of the armed forces.

Andropov reported on his conversations with Afghan leaders at a Soviet Politburo meeting of 7 February presided over by Brezhnev. A time-frame for an eventual withdrawal of Soviet forces was also discussed, with Ustinov proposing a period of one to one and a half years to allow for the internal situation to stabilize. Gromyko, after posing a rhetorical question ("Can we speak of a full withdrawal without getting anything in return?") went on to stress the need to think about agreed obligations to set between the sides before a withdrawal could be contemplated. He said that as the USSR would not be able to secure a full guarantee against attacks by hostile forces, they would have to provide for the full security of Afghanistan. Thus he left open the issue of a time-frame for a Soviet withdrawal as well as the question of the size of the forces that would be required to secure Afghanistan. The Soviet forces were to grow to more than 100,000 in the course of the occupation, allowing for periodic fluctuations in the figure, of which some 15,000 were to die and countless others be disabled or injured. Afghanistan was thus to become the Soviet Union's Vietnam, but with consequences far beyond any that could have been contemplated at the time, not least the revelation that the USSR was a giant with feet of clay.

CHAPTER 8

The Sovietization of Afghanistan (1979–89)

Babrak Karmal announced his own accession to power as the 'new phase' of the 'Saur Revolution'. He began his first broadcast to the nation on the night of 27–28 December 1979 by intoning the traditional Koranic invocation, embracing all elements of the Afghan nation, and paying lip-service to Taraki, 'our dear leader and noble founder of our party' murdered by 'that rogue' Amin. He went on to throw open the gates of the Pul-i-Charki prison, and decided to induct non-Party individuals into his administration in fulfilment of his old strategy of setting up a 'national democratic government' that would mobilize all sectors of society before a socialist transformation could be effected. By May 1980, of the 191 important appointments that were made, 78 were from outside the ranks of the PDPA.¹

Karmal also declared a general amnesty, promising exiles that they would be given back their houses, lands and properties if they came back to Afghanistan, making his promise doubly attractive by announcing that even if the real owners did not return, their close relatives would be treated as the owners if they came back.² Karmal also announced a provisional constitution under the heading of Basic Principles, one of these being the formation of a broad-based National Fatherland Front, another the acknowledgement of the supremacy of Islam. In pursuit of the latter policy, a separate Department of Islamic Affairs was set up, later turned into a full ministry, for the first time in Afghan history, and under communist patronage. But this was also a device to bring the clergy under close government supervision. The department was given control over the private finances and endowments of mosques throughout the country. The funds served not only to pay the stipends of the clergy, thus making them state employees, but also to finance the building and renovation of mosques. New mosques, 34 in Kabul alone, were eventually built, and 523 others renovated throughout the country. But such measures to win Muslim hearts and minds were ineffective. Before the Soviet invasion traditional fundamentalists had, in the name of Islam, railed against the modernizing decrees of Kabul, which they saw as intrusions by the state into the sacrosanct way of life of the qawm. After the Soviet action,

their rallying cry became that of jihad, a holy war for the liberation of Muslim Afghanistan from the infidel invaders and the overthrow of their local puppets.

Some two months after the arrival of the Soviet forces, a nationwide movement called Allah-u-Akbar (God is Great) was mobilized against the Karmal regime. Processions were organized during which slogans were chanted against the regime and its Soviet backers. At night-time the entire population would gather on the rooftops to intone the *azan*, the Muslim call to prayer, a novel form of non-violent protest that had been used in Pakistan to overthrow Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977. Anti-government pamphlets were distributed, terrorist activities multiplied in the towns as well as in rural areas, and Party members and activists were murdered.

So desperate had Karmal become in the face of widespread and growing resistance that in the summer of 1981 he announced a set of exemptions to the agricultural reforms that had been a major plank in the PDPA programme to eliminate landlordism and 'feudal' practices. The land reform decrees were no longer applicable to landowners in the following categories: officers of the armed forces, tribal leaders who supported the government, large landowners who were willing to undertake mechanized farming and sell the excess produce to the government, and smallholders and landless peasants who voluntarily offered to send their sons for national service in the Afghan armed forces - the last category being given special preference in the allotment of redistributed lands. Karmal's concessions did have an appreciable effect in areas where the military presence of the government was substantive. However, in areas where rebels were in control and where landless peasants continued to work for absentee landlords in Pakistan enjoying income from their lands, the concessions had little effect in gathering support for the regime.

The Karmal regime was further weakened by the resurgence of the old Parcham-Khalqi struggle within the ranks of the PDPA. The nationalist Khalqis led by Asadullah Sarwari, who had cooperated with Karmal in bringing in the Red Army to oust Amin, remained loyal to the memory of Taraki. The Khalqis were dominant in the officer corps of the Afghan armed forces and expected that Karmal's position would become weak when the Red Army withdrew after it had fulfilled its mission. But the Red Army did not withdraw. The Soviet leadership, as we have seen, had its own mission to fulfil.

One of the main points that Andropov had stressed during his talks with the Afghan leadership was the need to develop genuine party unity. In the very month of Andropov's lecture, Parchamis and Khalqis came to odds over what seemed to be the trivial issue of the national flag. Karmal wanted a new tricolour to replace the red banner favoured by the Khalqis. It was noted that at the march-past held to mark the second anniversary of the Saur Revolu-

tion, very few of the motorized units taking part flew the tricolour. Many of the tank commanders defiantly displayed the old red banner of the Khalqis. Karmal had to watch in embarrassed silence. There was nothing he could do. He was well aware that the Khalqis' chief source of support was the army which he could not afford to alienate. He attempted, however, to make changes in the army's top leadership by transferring, as a first step, seven commanders of important provincial garrisons to other duties. But when Parchami officers arrived to take charge, the Khalqi officers refused to honour their orders. No disciplinary action was taken against them for fear of a general revolt. The old political battles were now being fought within the military establishment.

The defence minister was a Parchami, as were the political commissars attached to army units; but no pro-Khalqi officers were inclined to obey them. Instead Khalqi officers, officials and party cadres rallied round Sarwari, an uncompromising nationalist who began to openly advocate the departure of the Red Army. Sarwari believed that the Afghan masses would turn against the revolution because of the Soviet military presence.³ In June 1980 Karmal, with the Kremlin's help, had Sarwari leave for Moscow for 'medical treatment', before reassigning him to Mongolia as ambassador.

Puli-Charki prison began to fill up once again, this time with Khalqi officials, cadres and officers, and 13 of them, including three ministers, were executed in June 1980. Some officers fled to join the resistance. In order to exploit the internal dissensions within the regime to their advantage, rebel leaders began to maintain lists of known pro-Khalqi officers who were not necessarily anti-Parcham activists. When a rebel was arrested by police or intelligence agents, and such lists were found on his person, the officers whose names figured on the lists were inculpated. According to an estimate cited by Rajah Anwar, some 600 such officers were imprisoned on conspiracy charges in the month of January 1981 alone, though many of them were later released for lack of evidence. Such futile vendettas undermined morale and weakened the motivation of the armed forces in fighting for a regime that could not command their loyalty.

The inter-factional rivalry became institutionalized within the power structure. The Interior Ministry was headed by a prominent Khalqi, Syed Ghulabzoi, the junior Air Force officer who had played a key role in the 1978 military putsch. Karmal could not easily dislodge him because of the power that his position gave him. Instead he separated the Intelligence Department from the Ministry's jurisdiction and set it up as an independent entity responsible for all matters relating to intelligence-gathering, arrests and the interrogation of prisoners and political detainees and so on, leaving Ghulabzoi's police to deal only with common criminals. The department, known by its notorious acronym KhaD, was placed under a loyal Karmal supporter,

Dr Najibullah, who was accorded military rank as a brigadier. He was promoted to lieutenant-general when the KHaD came to be equipped with an army division complete with helicopters, tanks and armoured cars. KHaD's cadres and agents were taken under the wing of the KGB and the East German Stasi and trained by their experts. KHaD became a dreaded instrument of state control. It had many responsibilities, ranging from internal intelligence, arrests and interrogations to the subversion of border tribes, assassinations, counter-intelligence operations, the infiltration of refugee organizations and sabotage in Pakistan. The tactics of terror and intimidation employed by KHaD became a staple of the stories narrated by Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan.

Ghulabzoi, for his part, expanded the police force under his control by drawing recruits from among Khalqi supporters and sympathizers until it became numerically superior to the army itself. Many of its units were converted into a light infantry force called Sarandoy. Armed clashes between KHaD and Sarandoy were not infrequent, and the sabotage of each others' efforts in their struggle against the Afghan resistance and mujahideen fighters was fairly common.

With a resentful and divided officer corps, and defections and desertions among the ranks, the armed forces dwindled to some 30,000 men, a third of its former size, within the first year of the Soviet invasion. So bad had the situation become that Karmal had difficulty in replenishing the emptying army cantonments. He was not even in a position to demobilize soldiers who had completed their year of compulsory military service. In December 1980 some 600 such soldiers threw down their weapons in front of the main police building in Kabul, formed themselves into a procession, and marched through the city demanding their immediate discharge. Karmal had to beat a hasty retreat. In 1981 an emergency programme of recruitment was ordered involving also the recall of men who had already performed their military service. Such forced recruitment only served to swell the numbers of those in the ranks who could be expected to desert at the earliest opportunity.

To supplement the crumbling armed forces a wide variety of militias was set up. The earliest, known as Soldiers of the Revolution, drew on city-bred party activists who soon proved no match for guerrilla fighters. Later, ordinary government employees were obliged to perform night-time guard duties. Additional civil defence units were set up to defend farms, factories and government buildings. There were women's militias, youth militias, ethnic militias and frontier militias. Some, as in tribal areas, were entirely mercenary; others had a hard core of committed party members and supporters. In 1987 Najibullah was to claim that the regime had half a million people under arms.

It is estimated that on the eve of the Soviet invasion, hard-core members of the PDPA, i.e. those fulfilling the stringent requirements for party membership according to Soviet-inspired norms, did not number more than 2500. First-hand observers like Rajah Anwar would allow a maximum of 5000, taking into account the purges of Parchamis by Taraki and Amin, the purges of Khalqis by Karmal, and the inevitable growth of a party that held the reins of power, attracting teachers, government employees, officers of the armed forces and others who acted out of self-interest rather than ideological conviction. In mid-1982 Karmal claimed that the PDPA had 70,000 members, a wildly exaggerated figure according to Western observers who put the figure closer to 20,000.⁴

As the Kremlin became more and more aware of the unpopularity and unreliability of the Karmal regime, it adopted a longer-term strategy to achieve its objective of 'securing' the future of Afghanistan in line with its 'national interests'. This involved the building of a youthful new elite that would loyally run a communist administration and stay committed to a pro-Soviet future for Afghanistan. Indoctrination began early. School children were encouraged or forced to enrol in the 'Young Pioneers' at the age of ten, and trained, among other things, to spy on their classmates or even on their families. A nationwide membership of 40,000 for the Young Pioneers was claimed in 1982. In Kabul there was a Palace of Pioneers, with a cinema, library and workshops, where propagandistic education was imparted twice weekly. According to George Arney:

At the age of fifteen, Young Pioneers were expected to join the Democratic Youth Organization of Afghanistan (DYOA), where they were split into small groups and assigned responsibilities such as surveillance and propaganda work, or guarding schools and government buildings. Membership of the DYOA led straight on to enrolment in the party, and, in 1987, Dr. Najibullah claimed that thirty percent of all students belonged either to the DYOA or the PDPA. Orphans, and children kidnapped from bombed villages, had the least chance of escaping indoctrination. They were educated in 'Fatherland Training Centres', or 'Watan Nurseries', where there was no check on communist propaganda. Mrs. Karmal was the official patron of the nurseries, but they were under the supervision of KHaD, and were designed to turn out highly committed agents. Children as young as ten years old were occasionally discovered infiltrating mujahedin groups.⁵

Even students who avoided enrolment in these organizations did not escape the process of Sovietization. The school curriculum was changed to include compulsory political science and Russian language courses. New textbooks were prepared under the supervision of Soviet advisers, and teachers were directed to lecture their students regularly on Afghan-Soviet friendship.

At Kabul University, student numbers dropped from 15,000 at the time of the Russian invasion to less than 5000 in 1983. All remaining students,

many of them women, were required to attend courses in Marxist-Leninist political theory, 'scientific' sociology and dialectical materialism. Independent-minded professors were purged or imprisoned and replaced by young party activists recruited for their loyalty rather than their qualifications. Soviet influences percolated throughout the whole system.

Tens of thousands of young Afghans were sent to study in the Soviet Union to further separate them from their roots. By 1984, 4000 students a year were being sent for 'advanced political indoctrination', according to US State Department estimates quoted by Arney. That same year, it was scheduled to send 2000 children between seven and ten years old annually for at least ten years' schooling in the USSR. Some were taken from the Watan Nurseries, but it was evident when the first batch of children was sent out to Central Asia in November 1984 that others had parents and relatives who had come to see them off at the airport.

Adults did not escape the programme of indoctrination, as may well be imagined in a Soviet-style state where the entire media was state-controlled. The radio, television, press and cinema provided an unrelieved diet of Marxist propaganda and 'socialist realism', to project an image of the Soviet Union as a workers' paradise, in contrast to Afghanistan's 'feudal' past. Soviet advisers controlled the news programmes, and Russian films were screened regularly on television and in the cinemas.

Another aspect of Sovietization was the introduction into Afghanistan - in a modified form - of the 'nationalities policy' that had been implemented in Soviet Central Asia by Stalin. In that case, the Russian Turkestan of the czars had been broken up into five 'autonomous' Soviet republics based on ethnic and linguistic lines. As we have seen, the PDPA's Decree No. 4 had elevated the Uzbek, Turcoman, Baluchi and Nuristani languages to the status of national languages, as in the case of Pashtun and the Afghan variant of Persian known as Dari. Dari, spoken by the Pashtun elite and by the Tajiks, was the lingua franca of Afghanistan and the usual medium of instruction in state schools. The PDPA had begun to promote the language and culture of the different ethnic groups through the media. The Karmal regime went even further: provincial schools began teaching children in their respective mother tongues for the first time. Newspapers, magazines and books were imported from the Central Asian Republics, and the historical and cultural affinities between the ethnic groups in the north and their cousins across the Amu Darya were highlighted by Afghan and Soviet propaganda. Nationalist-minded Afghans saw these policies as an attempt to isolate ethnic groups from each other and from the wider Muslim world, as the Soviets had done in Central Asia, and to drive a wedge between these groups and the Pashtuns who had traditionally dominated Afghan politics. The intensive exploitation by the Soviets of the natural resources of the north, especially its gas deposits,

was also seen as evidence of a plan to economically integrate that region with the rest of Central Asia.⁶

In the Pashtun regions of the south and east, the game of divide and rule was played out in a different way. The strategy was to establish contact with an influential tribal malik who was known to be the rival of a neighbouring malik who supported the resistance. The bargaining might, it was argued, lead to a mutual non-aggression pact in which the malik would receive weapons and cash subsidies in return for turning his kin group into a pro-government militia. It was a risky business though, as Arney points out. In one incident in September 1980 Karmal's minister for tribal affairs, Faiz Mohammad Faiz, set off from Kabul with a bagful of afghanis and several fattened sheep to celebrate the conclusion of lengthy peace negotiations with his own Zadran tribe. The tribal elders feasted themselves on the lamb and then shot him dead.

Despite the opposition of doctrinaire Marxists in the PDPA, Karmal adopted a more flexible and conciliatory policy towards the Pashtun tribes, particularly those straddling the south-eastern borders, in an effort to choke off the mujahideen supply lines from Pakistan. Some, like the Mohmands, were won over by offers of food, fuel, weapons and cash subsidies. A policy of non-interference in the customs and traditions of the tribes was also announced. In September 1985 a 'High Jirga of the Tribes' was held, with 4000 delegates attending - of whom a third were from Pakistan.

Attempts to make the regime more palatable to the population were half-hearted until a radical change in direction occurred in the Kremlin itself. In the spring of 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the CPSU after a long period of inertia at the Kremlin during the short-lived tenures of Andropov and Chernenko following the death of Brezhnev in November 1982. Nationwide elections to the long-promised loya jirga was announced by Karmal in April 1985. In the course of the year, the National Fatherland Front was given a non-PDPA chairman and efforts were made to 'broaden the social pillars of the revolution': the Revolutionary Council was doubled in size to include members of the clergy, the intelligentsia and the business community; dozens of non-Marxists were appointed to government posts; and tax breaks were accorded to the private economic sector.

But to restore the credibility of the regime, Karmal himself had to go. He could never live down the opprobrium of having been installed by Soviet tanks. Within the PDPA he had exacerbated rather than healed party divisions. Rumours circulated in Kabul about his mistresses and his drunken bouts; he had been truly reduced to a puppet, being increasingly sidelined at every turn by his Soviet advisers who took their cues from the Soviet ambassador. If it was already Gorbachev's intention at this stage to prepare for the

withdrawal of Soviet troops, no Afghan government led by Karmal could be expected to survive that eventuality.