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KANDAHAR VII. FROM 1973 TO THE PRESENT

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vii. From 1973 to the Present

KANDAHAR UNDER THE REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

As Mohammad Daoud Khan (see DĀWŪD KHAN) took power in July 1973, his ban on party political activities hit Kandahar too. Although they had cooperated with Daoud Khan in bringing him to power, the main victims of Daoud Khan's ban in Kandahar were the Khalq (Ḵalq [People]) and Parcham (Parčam [Banner]), two factions of the Communist Party of Afghanistan (Ḥezb-e Demokrātik-e Ḵalq-e Afḡānestān), because, during the previous democratic experiment, their activists had come out in the open and had exposed them (see communism iv; see also Arnold). As a result, their ability to work underground from 1973 onward was greatly reduced. The Maoists, who had enjoyed a significant following among the city's Shiʿite minority, had by now disintegrated as a political movement. By contrast, some other political groups that had remained mostly underground now enjoyed a competitive advantage in political activism. Among these was a group led by Shaikh Moḥammad Moḥseni, one of the leading Shiʿite clerics in Afghanistan, who had his *madrasa* in Kandahar. Moḥseni had founded a cultural movement called Ṣobḥ-e Dāneš, which in 1978 developed into a political party called Ḥarakat-e

Eslāmi. Moḥseni fled to Iran in 1973, but his followers seem to have remained active in Kandahar. Despite being a follower of non-political, moderate Ayatollah Sayyed Abu'l-Qāsem Ḵoʾi (q.v.), his ideas gradually evolved towards a form of political Islamism. Kandahar had never been a major recruitment spot for the Sunni Islamists, who were also active here after 1973 but were hunted by the security forces (interview with former Khalqi activist, London, 2008; interview with former Khalqi activist, Kabul, 2008; Harpviken, p. 34).

Under Daoud Khan (d. 1978), the program to modernize Afghanistan's cities continued. Education was a priority, and the teachers' training institute established in Kandahar remained the main focus of 'modernity' in the city. Although political activity there became more difficult, the students were still harbingers of 'modernity' in the city; for instance, this was the only place where girls were wearing skirts. Modernization of the Herat-Kandahar highway all the way to Kabul was discussed at that time, with Iran offering to fund it and India to provide technical expertise. The plan was formally approved by the government in 1976, but it was delayed, once Iran's finances were negatively affected by the end of the oil boom, and then abandoned following changes of regime in both Iran and Afghanistan (telephone interview with an expatriate based in Kandahar in the 1970s, 2008; Saikal, pp. 179-80).

Despite the abolition of the monarchy, Daoud Khan continued to pay respect to the Kandahari notables, and in the 1970s it was still held that, contrary to the rest of the country, only weak governors were appointed to this province in order not to upset local "men of influence." As a result, governance in Kandahar remained comparatively weak (telephone interviews with an expatriate based in Kandahar in the 1970s; interviewed in 2008).

UNDER THE COMMUNIST REGIME AND THE SOVIET OCCUPATION

Kandahar and the surrounding areas were among the last parts of Afghanistan to join the insurgency against the Soviets, although occasional violence was reported throughout 1979. Until the arrival of the Soviets, the resistance was mostly limited to the outlying districts, where some administrative centers (Ḵākrēz, Maʿruf, Šahrawak, and Rēgestān) were captured. The central districts, where the Popolzai and Barakzai tribes are mostly concentrated, joined the insurgency wholeheartedly only after the arrival of the Soviet army. Not only did the new, pro-Soviet regime of Babrak Kārmal (president, December 1979 to November 1986; see CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN) start

losing control over Kandahar's countryside, but trouble also started in the urban areas, and a large demonstration took place in Kandahar city on 31 December 1979. The local fraternity of delinquents (*payluč*), led by Ḥājj ʿAbd-al-Laṭif, seems to have played a key role in starting the revolt in Kandahar city. By late summer/autumn 1980, the government and the Soviet forces held limited control over the city, which the opposition was infiltrating easily. About half of the city's districts were permanently outside the government control at this time (Dorronsoro, p. 110; Roy, pp. 101 ff.; interviews with six former mujahidin commanders from Kandahar, March 2005 and January 2006).

While the original revolts were almost entirely spontaneous, opposition political parties and movements had begun relatively large-scale activities in Kandahar by 1979. All the Sunni opposition groups based in Peshawar were active in Kandahar Province, where the political landscape was particularly fragmented. No single group could even remotely claim to have a predominant influence over the province. Jamʿiyat-e Eslāmi of Borhān-al-Din Rabbāni received support mainly among the Alokozai tribe (Arḡandāb); it was led locally by Mullah Naqibullah (Mollā Naqib-Allāh Alokozai). Mahaz-e Melli of Sayyed Gailāni (Gilāni) was mainly based among the Barakzais and Popolzais (central districts) and was led locally by ʿAbd-al-Laṭif. Ḥezb-e Eslāmi had support mainly among the Ghilzais (see ḡilzi) and was led by ʿAziz Sarḵaṭib (mainly in the outlying districts on the border of Zabol). Ḥarakat-e Enqelāb of Nabi Moḥammed initially had several influential commanders (the most important was Mollā Malang) but lost most of them, mainly to Ḵāleṣ's Ḥezb-e Eslāmi. The Etteḥād-e Eslāmi of Sayyāf was led by Ostād ʿAbd-al-Ḥalim, and, like Ḵāleṣ's group, it expanded its influence over time; it was particularly influential among the Nurzais. Jabha-ye Nejāt-e Melli Sebqat-Allāh Mojaddedi was led by Ḥāji Aḥmad and had some influence among the Achakzais. Ḥarakat-e Eslāmi of Shaikh Moḥseni was also active among Kandahar's Shiʿite community from 1978; a Khomeinist group called Ḥezb-Allāh, also became active there during the 1980s (Roy, pp. 110 ff.; Dorronsoro, pp. 137 ff.).

Sporadic fighting was reported throughout the period to summer 1981, but no serious effort was made to bring the city back under control until February 1982, when the government gendarmerie (Sarandoy) made a first attempt to clear the city center of the presence of the opposition. Operations were going on in the countryside surrounding the city, but generally of relatively modest scope (battalion size). The year 1987 saw an intensification of the fighting,

particularly in the Arḡandāb valley, which government forces tried to secure without success. During that year a security belt was built around the city, making infiltration by the opposition much more difficult. With the withdrawal of Soviet troops in August 1988, the government soon lost the ability to control the Kabul-Kandahar highway, and Kandahar was effectively isolated from the capital. Spin Boldak was also abandoned after heavy bombardment by the Pakistani army, so that the government did not control the highway to Pakistan either. As of early 1988, the population of the city had dwindled to 50,000 from its original 200,000-250,000. However, with the appointment of Brigadier Nurul Haq Olumi (Nur-al-Ḥaqq ʿOlumi) as governor-general of the southern zone, the political situation started to improve. A Kandahari himself, ʿOlumi maintained good contacts with the local notables and used these to defuse the hostility. He started discussion with most armed group commanders and signed ceasefires with many of them. A truce was arranged whereby opposition fighters were allowed to enter the city as long as they left their weapons at the check posts. The population grew back to 150,000, and trade activities flourished again (Giustozzi, 2000, pp. 180-83; Urban, pp. 219-20).

The city of Kandahar received comparatively little damage during the war, despite earlier reports of extensive use of heavy weapons from the Soviet side. Outside the city, the presence of the government was mainly exercised through irregular militias, of which there were two main ones, that of Esmatullah Muslim (ʿEṣmat-Allāh Moslem) in Spin Boldak and that of Jabbār Khan in Maiwand (Maywand). Esmatullah had been an Achakzai opposition leader, who switched sides in 1984 and maintained an uneasy relationship with Kabul. His militias had to be kept out of the city because of their bad behavior, but he was universally acknowledged to be an effective military leader. Jabbār Khan was by contrast a member of Khalq, and his militia was more disciplined. It expanded gradually until it turned after 1989 into one of the main fighting forces under Kabul's orders. Maiwand was the only district which remained in the government's hands through to 1992, while Spin Boldak was the only other district to remain under Kabul's control through to 1988, when it fell to the opposition (Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, 2006, pp. 7 ff.; Urban, pp. 81-82, 218-20, 253-54).

With the fall of President Moḥammad Najibullah (president, September 1987 to April 1992) in Kabul, the various opposition groups were able to take over Kandahar in 1992 without further bloodshed. A provincial council of the

leading mujahidin figures was formed to run the province, including one from each of the six main tribes of the province and one to represent the Sayyeds (on whom, see AFGHANISTAN iv). The new government in Kabul picked among these its appointees for the main administrative and military positions of the province, with the top ones going to Naqibullah (Alokozai, corps commander), Amir Lalai (Popolzai, commander of the 15th Division), Gul Agha Shirzai (Gol Āqā Širzāi; Barakzai, governor, son of the deceased Haji Latif) and Abdul Haleem (Abd-al-Ḥalim; Noorzai, chief of police). Only Aziz Sarkhatib, a Ghilzai and head of Hezb-e Islami, was not appointed to a position of suitable importance and was left out of the divisions of the spoils. He and Hezb-e Islami were soon forcefully expelled from the city. The new military leaders were trying to assert themselves as tribal leaders but failed because of the weakness of tribal structures in this region. As a result, the new arrangements did not suffice to rule Kandahar effectively. In fact Kandahar province had in 1992-94 the unenviable record of being Afghanistan's worst administered province, with a total collapse of security. The roads were infested by bandits, and the various militias were overtaxing the population. By this point Kandahar had completely lost the incipient feeling of 'modernity' which had characterized it in the 1970s, and the schools were closed (Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, 2007, pp. 171-72; Dorronsoro, pp. 240 ff.).

UNDER THE TALIBAN REGIME

The conquest of Kandahar by the Taliban represented a turning point for the city in many regards. For the first time the city was subjected to a clerical regime. As in the rest of the country under Taliban domination, Kandahar was subjected to a puritanical regime under which all entertainment was banned. Order was restored in the urban area, on the roads, and in the countryside. Apart from having the support of groups of Taliban previously associated with Harakat-e Enqelab, the movement of Mullah Omar also received the support of some former leaders of the Mujahidin, such as Mullah Naqibullah, previously an important military leader of Jam'iyat in Arghandab. Kandahar also returned to a position of political prominence that it had not enjoyed since the 18th century; although the capital formally remained Kabul, the supreme leader of the Taliban Emirate, Mullah Omar (elected 'commander of the faithful' in April 1996 by an assembly of ulama), continued to reside in Kandahar. Hence all key decisions were taken in Kandahar, where Mullah Omar would gather his advisers and collaborators and issue decrees. A Shura (*šurā* "council") was established in Kabul in 1996 to function as government

under Mullah Rabbani, but a separate Supreme Shura also continued to exist in Kandahar with about 10 members, all ulama belonging to Mullah Omar's closest circle. The Taliban regime also counted a large number of clerics from Kandahar among its top ranks and in the sub-national administration—a fact which contributed to highlighing the importance of the province. The Kandahar Islamic Supreme Court also became the most important court in the country, even if the Ministry of Justice and the Supreme Court continued to operate in Kabul, as it appointed judges in the provinces and called them to meetings in Kandahar once or twice a year. During this period Kandahar was the only province in Afghanistan to which the rule of appointing governors and key officials from outside the province was not applied (Dorronsoro, pp. 278 ff.; Rashid, pp. 101-4, 125, 98; Griffin, p. 60).

Apart from the clergy, the social group closest to the Taliban appears to have been the traders. They were reported to have funded the Taliban in their early days and were then rewarded with low taxes and little control over their activities. Smuggling across the border with Pakistan, always a popular activity in the region, was largely tolerated by the Taliban, to the benefit of the traders involved. The bazaar of Kandahar city was also rebuilt. Thanks to Pakistani help, a number of essential services were restored to Kandahar: Pakistani telephone numbers were assigned to the city under Quetta's prefix; repairs were done to roads and to the airport; and electricity was restored (Rashid, pp. 27, 184-85).

Although the Taliban faced no major challenge to their rule in Kandahar during 1994-2001, a revolt in the villages against conscription was reported in early 1997. Following the American attack on the Taliban regime, Kandahar was the last city to fall, but the Taliban left it without fighting. Militias sponsored by the Americans hastily gathered to fight the Taliban under some of the old strongmen, but in Kandahar militarily their impact was almost insignificant. The Taliban handed over its control to Mullah Naqibullah and Haji Bashar (Bašar), who had supported the Taliban despite never being given an official position by them. They then proceeded to negotiate a deal with Karzai and the Americans (Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, 2007, p. 172).

UNDER UNITED STATES OCCUPATION AND THE KARZAI GOVERNMENT

In November 2001, when the Taliban had just left Kandahar, the city was initially under the control of two former mujahidin commanders who had supported the Taliban, Mullah Naqibullah, and Haji Bashar. They tried to

gather tribal elders and ulama and organize a ‘fair’ distribution of power among different interest groups, but faced objections by some important players, such as Gul Agha Shirzai, who had been paid by the Americans to mobilize a militia and challenge the Taliban in the south. Several other leaders of armed groups were busy trying to re-mobilize their men in the wake of the Taliban collapse. After some tension and some small-scale armed clashes, Gul Agha and his allies managed to impose their own vision of a power-sharing agreement. Gul Agha was once again appointed governor and also took control of the lucrative customs post of Spin Boldak. Mullah Naqibullah was marginalized as a result of his earlier collaboration with the Taliban, but some of his Alokozai allies were appointed to important positions: Akram Khakrizwal (Ḵākrizwal) became chief of police, while Khan Mohammed became commander of Army Corps. Aziz Sarkhatib was once again marginalized, while others were appointed in lower positions in the army and in the administration (Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, 2007, pp. 173-74, 176).

The following years (2002-07) saw the gradual rise to ever greater influence of Ahmad Wali Karzai, brother of President Karzai, and the decline of all other major players. The Alokozai faction lost its positions in the army first (through the disbandment of the old units) and then in the police, and it was further weakened by the assassination of Khakrizwal in June 2005 and the death of Mullah Naqibullah himself in October 2007. The Barakzai faction, led by Gul Agha, was weakened because of his removal from the position of governor and the loss of control over customs. Although a substantial presence of Barakzais in the administration continued, Ahmad Wali Karzai’s Popolzais became an increasingly dominant force, particularly once a close ally of the Karzais, Asadullah Khalid (Asad-Allāh Ḵāled), became governor in June 2005. Gul Agha’s control over much of the city economic activities eased after his ‘promotion’ to minister in August 2003. During his second stint as governor in the first half of 2005, he had already lost much of his influence (Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, 2007, pp. 172 ff.; Chayes, pp. 160-62, 164-67, 169-70, 178-85, 298-303).

The presidential elections of October 2004 saw Karzai triumph with 91 percent of the votes in the province. The result was a disappointment for the local opposition to Ahmad Wali and Gul Agha, both of whom had supported Karzai’s confirmation bid. The main opposition candidate, Yunis Qanuni (Yunes Qānuni), who despite being a Tajik had enlisted the support of a number of local notables, particularly former military commanders from the

Alokozai tribe, only gathered 3 percent of the provincial vote. The parliamentary elections of September 2005, however, showed a more complex political picture. Although the most voted candidate was Abdul Qayyum (Abd-al-Qayyum) Karzai, another of the President's brothers, many other successful candidates were critical of the Karzais, including former governor-general of the south (1988-90) Nurul Haq Olumi, Arif (ʿĀref) Noorzai, Amir Lalai, Habibullah Jan (Ḥabib-Allāh Jān) and others. Only three of the new members of parliament (out of 11) were clearly pro-Karzai. Some of the opponents had previously been supporting the Karzais before moving to the opposition, such as Arif Noorzai and Amir Lalai; this reflected the shrinking support for the Karzais in their homeland. The elections also highlighted the decline of Gul Agha, only one of whose allies made it to the parliament. Gul Agha was not even able to muster the support of the majority of the Barakzais for the candidates he sponsored, having lost most of his sources of revenue. Similarly Mullah Naqibullah could not get any of his men elected. His fate highlights how the establishment of tribe-based factions in late 2001-early 2002 was more a matter of patronage than of genuine tribalism; the resurrected tribes had no strong social or economic base and rested on residual tribal identity, strengthened by the distribution of employment and other resources. Once the sources of patronage dried up, 'tribal' support evaporated too (Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, 2007, pp. 175-76, 179 ff.).

Another development highlighting the declining support for the power arrangements in Kandahar and Kabul was the spread of the Neo-Taliban insurgency to newer and newer areas of the province. Already in 2002 some cross-border raids were taking place along the frontier with Pakistan, but their impact was limited. By the summer of 2003, however, with the fall of all of Zabul province (except a few posts) into the hands of the insurgents, the situation in the outlying districts of Kandahar also started to worsen rapidly, particularly in Maruf (Maʿruf) and Myaneshēr (Miānešir). These mountainous districts were not only more difficult to control, but were inhabited by disaffected sections of the population, mostly Ghilzais who had no contact or patron in the administration. They were often being discriminated against or even harassed in Kandahar, and as a result they became more receptive to Taliban propaganda (Giustozzi, 2007, pp. 56, 46 ff.).

During 2002-05, foreign forces deployed in Kandahar mainly maintained a low profile. A Canadian contingent was deployed in 2001-03, while a United States contingent was present in Kandahar throughout the 2001-07 period. In

particular, the Americans maintained control over the airport, which was only partially handed over to civilian authorities in 2006. Military operations were carried out in the outlying districts of Kandahar throughout the period of foreign military presence, but the fighting was limited in scope and violence until 2004, when bigger military operations started being mounted to contain the attacks of the Taliban in the mountains. The gradually worsening security situation prompted the deployment of a larger number of foreign troops from the spring of 2006, when the Canadians returned to Kandahar in strength (2,300 troops). Large-scale fighting occurred in particular in September 2006, when the insurgents tried to fight a pitched battle in Pashmul (Pašmol), 20 km west of Kandahar city, and suffered heavy casualties (Giustozzi, 2007, pp. 124 ff., 197-98).

The strengthened deployment of foreign troops in 2006, together with their new agenda of more active involvement in fighting the insurgency, might have indirectly contributed to the expansion of the insurgency to the central districts of Kandahar during that year. What is certain is that the arrival of the Canadians and the spread of the insurgency coincided. There is also evidence that some units of the Afghan security forces intensified their aggressive behavior against local communities which they considered hostiles, possibly feeling stronger because of the deployment of additional foreign troops. Panjwāy and Zhari (Žari) became major focuses of opposition activity, which was still present at the end of 2007. Maiwand was also largely under the control of the insurgency by then, while large-scale infiltration of Khakrēz had also started. Occasional attacks were at this point also taking place in Kandahar city itself (Giustozzi, 2007, pp. 125, 197).

As a result of the intensified insurgency and of the fact that a disproportionate share of the burden of fighting it fell on their shoulders, Kandahar's police force was in very poor condition by 2007. When he was in charge, Khakrizwal had tried to give the police a more professional look—he was himself a former police officer. After his transfer in August 2003, however, the police force went into steady decline. Although most of its low-ranking members were still Alokozai, at least in Kandahar city itself, it proved increasingly difficult to convince professional officers to serve in Kandahar and particularly in the districts. Here casualty rates were very high, and living conditions poor, leaving to the Ministry of Interior no alternative but to recruit local strongmen and their militias and make them wear a uniform. The result was an undisciplined, corrupt, and abusive police force, which may well have

contributed to stoking the fire of the insurgency (Giustozzi, 2007, pp. 56, 173 ff.).

As of 2007 the prospects of Kandahar to again play a dynamic role within Afghanistan appeared dim, and not only because of the insurgency. Of the provinces including a major city within their borders, Kandahar had the lowest literacy rate (13.4 percent), to a large extent due to the fact that women still had limited access to schooling. According to the Ministry for Rural Reconstruction, only 4.6 percent of women were estimated to be educated. Although an effort was made in 2002-05 to launch education, even in 2002 in Kandahar city itself the enrolment rate of girls was one-quarter that of boys. A wave of attacks against schools, which started in 2004 in the more remote areas but had extended to Kandahar city by 2006, contributed to compound the problem, as many schools were closed and many parents opted not to send children to school even when one was available (interviews with local officials; Ministry for Rural Reconstruction and Development, *Report on Rural Literacy*).

The corruption of the police, the lack of skilled and trained workforce, and the rising insecurity conspired to constrain economic recovery in Kandahar, particularly in 2006, when violence began to approach the city. In 2007 the economy partially recovered from the 2006 downturn, with food supplies in particular growing markedly. In part the recovery of business activities might have been due to the further expansion of narcotics production in neighboring Helmand province, as increasingly after 2001 the core of Kandahar's business activities became the narcotics trade. Another factor in the recovery is likely to have been the injection of aid money, which increased considerably after the fighting in 2006 was widely seen as an alarm bell by donors. The government tried to diversify the local economy by building an industrial park outside the city, but failed to provide it with the necessary facilities. Another, better equipped industrial park was being built in 2007 with USAID funds (Ministry for Rural Reconstruction and Development, *Provincial Profile*).

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