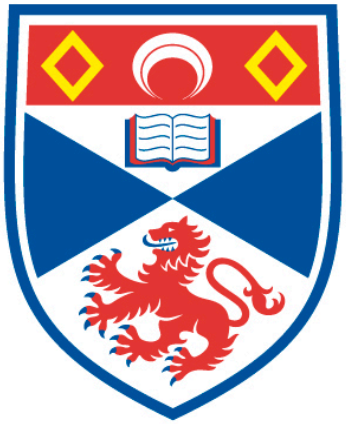
IRAN'S ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN IN THE MODERN ERA : LEVERAGING INFLUENCE FOR REGIONAL SUPREMACY

Heather MacLeod Robinson

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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Leveraging Influence for Regional Supremacy

Heather MacLeod Robinson

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

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Contents

Abstract

This dissertation provides an in-depth historical analysis of the motivations and actions surrounding Iran's foreign policy toward Afghanistan in the modern era. The need for this research stems from a significant gap in Western scholarship on the Iranian-Afghan relationship that accounts for any period of the countries' interactions in detail. It is argued here that despite rhetoric to the contrary, successive Iranian governments consistently pursued policies of political, military, and economic interference in Afghanistan as an integral part of Iran's desire to achieve a dominant position of leadership in its region. This persistent approach has been grounded in both the historical experience and the mythology surrounding Iran's once-great status as an empire, which was destroyed by the Afghans and the great powers during the colonial period, and the resultant Iranian irredentism toward Afghanistan that followed. In analysing the course of Iran's policy toward Afghanistan, a defining feature is that it has never been divorced from Iran's competition against the great powers that have continuously been involved in Afghanistan and the region. This work first provides a long-view historical context of the Iranian-Afghan relationship, which demonstrates that since Afghanistan separated from the Persian Empire in 1747, Afghanistan held an important place of relevance in the perpetuation of myths that underpin the persistent ideology of Iranian nationalism, which manifest in an Iranian foreign policy of interventionism toward Afghanistan. This, combined with the continued strategic importance of Afghanistan to the great powers and their encroachment on Iran and Afghanistan, heavily influenced Iran's foreign policy toward Afghanistan. During the Cold War, Iran used the power gained from aligning with the United States to develop political, economic, and military dominance over Afghanistan and leveraged that to successfully attain regional leadership separate from the United States and in competition with the Soviet Union. When the Islamic Republic was created in 1979, despite its ideological and structural differences from previous Iranian regimes, the policy toward Afghanistan and its importance to Iran's wider foreign policy aims, were consistent with previous regimes' motivations. This regime's 'export' of Iran's Islamic revolutionary influence to different Afghan polities during the Soviet occupation was a religious manifestation of the same Iranian nationalist ideology that was primarily concerned with advancing Iran's regional position in competition with the Soviet Union and the United States.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I must thank my wonderful and loving parents, Trish and John Robinson, who have always encouraged me to pursue my passions and never stop achieving my goals, including this doctorate. To my friends, thank you for tolerating me and keeping me sane throughout this very long journey. All of your support, love, and faith in me during the brightest and darkest times is the only reason this was possible.

I would of course like to thank my PhD supervisor Professor Ali Ansari, who has served as a source of inspiration throughout my academic life, even prior to my postgraduate studies at St Andrews. I came to Scotland specifically to study under him, and I owe so much of my understanding of Iran to Ali's exquisite expertise and tutelage. Thank you for believing in me, for showing me the power of history and myth in understanding the world today, and for always being a constant resource and mentor to me.

Thank you to the University of St Andrews for being such an excellent and understanding academic home. So many staff in the library, the School of History, the other academic schools, the Registry, and the student support center have contributed to my ability to complete this dissertation. The facilities and flexibility made available to me as I conducted research and archival work in several countries over the period of seven years, mostly while working full-time, were second to none.

I have so much gratitude for the many guiding conversations along the way with my fellow PhD candidates and numerous researchers and staff at various libraries and archives I frequented, particularly the National Archives at Kew in London and the Library of Congress in Washington. As someone who had undergraduate training in political science, learning how to explore and utilize archives, a breathtaking window into the past, was the most treasured part of my experience completing this doctorate.

Finally, thank you to Jennifer Shafizadeh, my good friend during my undergraduate studies at Columbia, and Amy Glenn, a beloved high-school teacher who taught my first class on the history of the Middle East. Without their kindness and guidance, I may have never been introduced to the dynamic, contradictory, complex, beautiful, and fascinating history, culture, and politics of Iran and the wider region, which has subsequently become the rewarding focal point of my academic and professional life.

A Note on Transliteration

This dissertation utilizes the transliteration scheme of the *Iranian Studies* journal (Association for Iranian Studies),[1] and is reproduced below:

***Iranian Studies* transliteration scheme**

Consonants

z	ض	b	ب
t	ط	p	پ
z	ظ	t	ت ث
‘	ع	s	ث
gh	غ	j	ج
f	ف	ch	چ
q	ق	h	ح ه
k	ک	kh	خ
g	گ	d	د
l	ل	z	ذ
m	م	r	ر
n	ن	z	ز
h	ه	zh	ژ
v	و	s	س
y	ی	sh	ش
‘	ء	s	ص

Vowels

short	long	diphthongs
a (as in *ashk*)	a or ā (as in *ensan* or *āb*)	-
e (as in *fekr*)	i (as in *melli*)	ey (as in Teymur)
o (as in *pol*)	u (as in Tus)	ow (as in *rowshan*)

Other rules include:

-The ezafeh is written as -e after consonants, e. g. ketab-e and as -ye after vowels (and silent final h), e. g. darya-ye and khaneh-ye

-The silent final h is written, e. g. Dowleh

-The tashdid is represented by a doubling of the letter, e. g. takhassos

-The plural ha is added to the singular, as in dast-ha

[1] Association for Iranian Studies, ‘Transliteration Scheme,’ <https://associationforiranianstudies.org/journal/transliteration>[10 June 2020].

Introduction

Overview and Objectives

The purpose of this dissertation is to present an in-depth historical analysis of the motivations and actions surrounding Iran's foreign policy toward Afghanistan in the modern era. The need for this research stems from a significant gap in Western scholarship on the Iranian-Afghan relationship that accounts for any period of the countries' interactions in detail; discussed subsequently, the few examples that do exist, only developed over the last 10-15 years, are limited to journal-length analysis, rely primarily on Western secondary sourcing (often offering only partial, or no, Iranian and Afghan perspective), and lack sound historical methodology, particularly the use of archival records. This is surprising given that Iran and Afghanistan are both geopolitically strategic nations, with the latter holding a formidable history of many states' stalemated conflicts, extensive meddling, and protracted investment of blood and treasure. Thus, this little-researched subject holds immense potential for the expansion of historical and political scholarship on Iranian and Afghan studies and their related fields, and is pertinent for policymakers of the states invested in the Middle East and South Central Asia.

Other realities of the literature have inspired this work. There are many histories on Iran and Afghanistan respectively–including some that briefly address interactions with the other country–but none that provide a long-view assessment focusing specifically on the dynamics of the bilateral Iranian-Afghan relationship. There also exists a profusion of political and diplomatic histories on Iran and Afghanistan with the discussion narrowed to the period leading up to and following 1979, when both countries experienced revolutions that undoubtedly produced dramatic changes in their political orientation. However, this tendency exposes a bias of contemporary historians, political scientists, and international relations theorists of framing the discourse on modern Iranian and Afghan politics largely within the context of the post-1979 environment. While this era was indeed a definitive turning point when both nations underwent transformative political changes, this perspective negates the lessons and products of the previous centuries of the Iranian and Afghan

experience and considers these long-existing civilizations within an extremely limited context.

Even less examined is the extensive diplomatic history of Iran's relationships with its immediate neighbours, especially *before* the revolution, to understand how these interactions correspond to contemporary Iran's wider foreign policy aims. Therefore, the period chosen for examination here, modern Iran from roughly 1921 to roughly 1987 (with a discussion of the historical background of Iranian-Afghan relations from the creation of the Afghan state in 1747 to its independence in 1919) reflects a desire to contribute a broader understanding of the historical underpinnings of Iran's regional foreign policy that is too frequently neglected in the contemporary scholarship.[2] The work ceases its in-depth analysis of the relationship at 1987 due to the fact that most primary-source documents (government records, especially) needed to support an understanding of the last three decades have yet to be declassified.

This dissertation also fundamentally challenges another now-engrained tendency in the literature and in Western policy circles, to use the term 'Af-Pak' when discussing Afghanistan and its immediate neighbourhood. British etymologist Michael Quinion identifies the term's origin to career American diplomat Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who said in a conference that its use at the State Department was 'an attempt to indicate and imprint in our DNA the fact that there is one theater of war, straddling an ill-defined border, the Durand Line.'[3] The issue in view of this research is not whether the Durand Line should be contested, but that the term skews the discourse to promote that Afghanistan's commonalities and relations with Pakistan are the most significant factor in defining its identity and political and economic orientation, while also revealing a Western penchant for lumping Afghanistan and Pakistan together based on the former's post-2001 experiences in the

[2] Much attention has been given to Iranian foreign policy in the scholarship, especially post-1979, but R.K. Ramazani and Shireen Hunter are two of the few examples of those who have written substantively on Iranian *regional* foreign policy before and after the revolution. See, Ramazani, R.K. *Independence Without Freedom: Iran's Foreign Policy* (Charlottesville: 2013) and *Iran's Foreign Policy, 1941-73: A Study of Foreign Policy in Modernizing Nations* (Charlottesville: 1988); Hunter, Shireen. *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*, (Santa Barbara: 2010).

[3] Quinion, Michael. 'Afpak,' in *World Wide Words,* 18/4/2009, <http://www.worldwidewords.org/turnsofphrase/tp-afp1.htm>[8 March 2018].

region and what is deemed as the 'arbitrary' nature of the Durand Line.[4] While Pakistan and India have played and continue to play crucial roles in Afghanistan's ethnic and cultural legacy that should not be understated, defining the study of Afghanistan and the region around the term Af/Pak ignores the equally, if not more historically influential, impact of Persia and modern Iran on Afghanistan.

Therefore, utilizing a historical methodology of primary and secondary source integration and analysis—including available documentary and archival records, Iranian and Afghan primary sources, the existing scholarship, and other Western, Iranian, and Afghan secondary sources—the main objectives of this work include:

1) To detail and examine the motivations and actions comprising Iran's foreign policy toward Afghanistan during both states' modern histories
2) To understand how Iran's Afghan policy has historically fit within Iran's wider foreign policy aims, particularly its priority relationships with the superpowers active in its region (the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union)
3) Relatedly, to determine how and why Iran has used its relations with and/or role in Afghanistan as a point of leverage with the superpowers, the implications for this behaviour, and what it achieved in line with Iran's foreign policy objectives
4) And, to demonstrate a continuity in modern Iran's regional foreign policy, despite its differing regimes' stated and actual ideological and structural differences. This is based on historical mythology informing an ideological drive toward Iranian nationalism throughout the period examined in this work.

This dissertation argues that despite rhetoric to the contrary, successive Iranian governments consistently pursued policies of political, military, and economic interference in Afghanistan as an integral part of Iran's desire to achieve a dominant position of regional leadership. This persistent approach is grounded in both the historical experience and mythology surrounding Iran's once-great status as an empire, which was destroyed by the Afghans and the great powers during the colonial

[4] Andreas Wilde also contests the common use of 'Af-Pak' due to the much-ignored impact of Iranian-Afghan relations. See, Wilde, Andreas. 'Underestimated and Ignored: Iran's Current Afghanistan Policy between Soft Power and Hard Measures,' in Aglaya Snetkov and Stephen Aris (eds.), *The Regional Dimensions to Security: Other Sides of Afghanistan* (London, 2013), p. 100.

period, and the resultant Iranian irredentism toward Afghanistan that followed. Therefore, in analysing the course of Iran's policy toward Afghanistan in the modern era, a defining feature is that it has never been divorced from Iran's competition against the great powers that have continued to be involved in Afghanistan and the wider region.

The long-view historical context of the Iranian-Afghan relationship provided in Chapters One and Two demonstrates that since Afghanistan wrested its independence from the Persian Empire in 1747, Afghanistan has held an important place of relevance in the perpetuation of the 'Myth of the Great Civilisation' and the 'Myth of Foreign Domination' in Iranian political culture. These are two of the many myths that underpin the persistent ideology of Iranian nationalism, which manifest in an Iranian foreign policy of interventionism toward Afghanistan.[5] This, combined with the continued strategic importance of Afghanistan to the great powers, leading to great-power encroachment on Iran and Afghanistan, heavily influenced Iran's foreign policy toward Afghanistan during the period examined here.

Chapter Three of this work examines how Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, at the height of the Cold War, uses the power Iran gains from an alignment with the United States and its massive oil wealth to develop political, economic, and military dominance over Afghanistan and leverage that to successfully attain regional leadership separate from the United States and in competition with the Soviet Union.

Chapter Four details how, despite the ideological and structural differences of the Islamic Republic compared to previous Iranian regimes, the Islamic Republic's policy toward Afghanistan and the importance of it to Iran's wider foreign policy aims, were consistent with previous regime's motivations. The regime's 'export' of Iran's Islamic revolutionary influence to different Afghan polities during the Soviet occupation was simply a religious manifestation of the same Iranian nationalist

[5] The idea of the pervasiveness of Iranian nationalism as the primary ideology of modern Iran, based heavily in myth, is the brainchild of scholar Ali Ansari, who was the supervisor of this dissertation. See Chapter One of this dissertation for a wider discussion of how myth informs history and ideology. Ansari, Ali M. *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* (Cambridge: 2012), pp. 1-35. For a deeper discussion of irredentism, see Chapter One.

ideology that was primarily concerned with advancing Iran's regional position in competition with the Soviet Union and the United States.

Finally, this work will conclude with a brief discussion of the relevance of these findings on Iran's policy toward Afghanistan from 1987 onwards.

Methodology and Source Discussion

It should be noted that because the principal concentration of this dissertation is Iranian foreign policy toward, and influence in, Afghanistan and its relevance to Iran's wider regional and global interests, Afghan, Pakistani, American, and Soviet foreign policies and motivations are often addressed where relevant but are not given the same intensive consideration.

As mentioned, a historical methodology has been prioritised for this work. The timeframe was largely dependent on the availability of high-quality primary sources, with a preference for archival and documentary sources, as well as other types of Iranian and Afghan primary sources (memoirs, speeches, etc.). Due to declassification procedures for government records in the United States and United Kingdom, there was an abundance of archival materials covering the 1970s and 1980s, but very few from the 1990s and on.[6]

This dissertation has made substantial use of these British and American records—some declassified as recently as June 2019—that have received little or (most of which) no attention in the existing literature. This was the result of an opportunity to conduct roughly three years of archival research in both London (for The National Archives at Kew) and Washington (the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) at College Park, which included the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) Records Research Tool (CREST) until published online January

[6] The British government began in 2013 to release 20-year-old records instead of 30. Due to the unequal rollout of this policy across record types, the latest tranche of Iran and Afghanistan records released covered most years through 1989. The American system automatically declassifies documents after 25 years unless they meet certain security exemptions. However, due to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, the release of younger documents deemed non-sensitive can be accelerated and made publicly available much sooner. See the following section for more information about FOIA. On declassification, see: The National Archives. '20-Year Rule,' <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/our-role/plans-policies-performance-and-projects/our-projects/20-year-rule/>[8 March 2018]; National Archives. 'The President Executive Order 13526,' 29/12/2009, <https://www.archives.gov/isoo/policy-documents/cnsi-eo.html>[8 March 2018].

2017,[7] the Library of Congress, the National Security Archive at George Washington University, and the Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC) at National Defense University until it closed permanently in June 2015).

The greatest methodological challenge presented by this research topic has been the infeasibility of accessing Iranian and Afghan archival materials due to the security concerns (political in Iran and conflict-related in Afghanistan) for a female, American student conducting research alone in either country. Added to the risks themselves were issues of access, whether to the relevant government archives (Iran)[8] or because the archives were mostly uncatalogued, and therefore not organised in any standard archival format (Afghanistan).[9] Additionally, the language skills of this scholar are limited to English, with only basic understanding of written Persian, making translation of high-level government documents impossible without cost- and time-prohibitive assistance. This has also restricted the use of Persian-language sources in this dissertation—admittedly a key shortcoming. However, the expansive use of previously untapped Western archival sources, as well as translated Iranian and Afghan primary and secondary sources, have yielded a significant body of evidence worthy of examination in its own right.

Western Archival Sources

As mentioned, extensive archival research for this dissertation was conducted on-site at the British National Archives at Kew. The archives pertinent to this work are mainly the documentary records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), especially those folders related to 'Iran-Afghanistan relations,' of which there are several. Those and dozens of other records (folders) were analysed and cited for this dissertation, most of which contained upwards of 20-30 folios (documents) each.

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[7] CIA, 'CREST: 25-Year Program Archive,' <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/collection/crest-25-year-program-archive>[8 March 2018]

[8] Visiting Iran's archives would require a visa, introduction letter, and foreign-ministry approval that would likely be unobtainable due to this researcher's nationality and research subject matter. See, U.S. Department of State, 'World Wide Diplomatic Archives Index: Iran,' <https://history.state.gov/countries/archives/iran>[8 March 2018]; DissertationReviews.org, 'The National Archives and Library in Tehran,' 2/12/2014, <http://dissertationreviews.org/archives/10352>[8 March 2018].

[9] DissertationReviews.org, 'The National Archives of Afghanistan,' 14/5/2015, <http://dissertationreviews.org/archives/12243> [8 March 2018].

Similar to their American counterpart, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, the FCO's records represent the official British government's foreign policy position on the affairs that they detail. However, what is unfortunately different is that the National Archives' records themselves are generally not available online, though its online catalogue makes identifying the necessary records somewhat easier. Also different is that the FCO record is the only substantial account of British foreign policies and decision-making contained at the National Archives; aside from a small collection of cabinet papers and miscellaneous documents from other government entities, there are very few records from essential organisations like the Ministry of Defence or the intelligence services. This obviously restricts from inclusion the potentially more sensitive and revealing types of information one could potentially glean from those sources. Another limitation of the FCO documents appears to be the less detailed account of events in Iran and Afghanistan during the 1970s (perhaps because the British had stepped back from their role in the region in 1971), compared to American archival records of the same period.

In contrast, the most advantageous aspect of the FCO's archival records was their particular utility during periods when the Americans had less reach in the region. This is the case for much of the 1980s (Chapter Four) when the United States had little diplomatic insight into Iran (after the U.S. Embassy seizure and hostage crisis) or Afghanistan (after the murder of Ambassador Adolph Dubs and the raging Soviet-Afghan War).[10] More generally, the FCO folios' detailed exchanges between London and her embassies in the region (usually Tehran and Kabul, but occasionally other proximate outposts), as well as the internal memoranda between the various departments and officials within the FCO, provide a thorough accounting of and context for Iranian-Afghan relations during the period covered. Seen in the chapters, the main FCO offices handling the events in and relations between Iran and Afghanistan were the South Asia Department (SAD) and the Middle East Department (MED). The SAD and MED officials often brought considerable institutional perspective to bear against the occasionally shorter-term insights of embassy officials

[10] However, as noted later in this section, this did not appear to affect American intelligence reporting on either country, which was considerable.

reacting to daily events on the ground. Critically, the British regional embassies regularly included in their correspondence copies of official Iranian and Afghan documents (either an official English version or translated), such as foreign ministry communiqués, treaties, and other official statements and agreements that could not be accessed by this researcher in either Iran or Afghanistan. Iranian and Afghan media clips were also frequently reproduced in the British record. Use of both British and American archival materials also have the benefit that, in periods when the Iranian-Afghan relationship when relations were poor, both countries, but particularly Afghanistan, used the United States and United Kingdom as intermediaries to communicate messages to the other country or to complain about grievances.[11]

Given the nature of this topic, partly to understand how Iranian-Afghan relations are situated with regard to Iran's relationship with the United States, American archival materials constitute a considerable amount of the Western documentary record analysed here. This is also due to the larger quantity of relevant American archival records when compared to the British archives. Discussed above, there were at least four separate physical archives where it was possible to conduct research for this dissertation: NARA at College Park, the Library of Congress, the National Security Archive, and the CRRC. This does not include several important, and massive, online (remote) resources that required equal, if not more, attention, such as the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series on the State Department Office of the Historian's website, and the CIA's CREST files and the Freedom of Information Act[12] Electronic Reading Room (eFOIA), added relatively recently (January 2017), on the CIA's website. Detailed below, each of these archives hold different types of government records, and consulting all of them, despite some overlap, provided an comprehensive narrative of what most relevant U.S. government

[11] See, for example, Chapter Three's subsection on Pashtunistan, Baluchistan, and Dominating Daoud.
[12] The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was established in 1967 to provide the public 'the right to request access to records from any federal agency' to keep citizens informed about the actions of their government. A request allows the release of government records that do not fall under one of nine exemptions that 'protect interests such as personal privacy, national security, and law enforcement.' Documents are often released with redactions made to exclude information that risks national security, or otherwise relates to the other FOIA exemption areas. See, FOIA.gov, 'What is FOIA,' <https://www.foia.gov/about.html>[9 March 2018].

entities were seeing, thinking, and acting upon involving Iran and Afghanistan during the time period researched.

To first address the large bodies of remote, online archival materials, the FRUS collection, like the British FCO records, is generally classed as the U.S. government's official account of American foreign policy, decision-making, and foreign events under the various administrations they cover. As such, the types of documents included in the series are cables between State headquarters and the regional embassies, backchannel messages between the White House and ambassadors, and memoranda of several government and non-governmental entities. Detailed more in the bibliography, for the purposes of this work, the relevant Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Soviet Union (and in some cases the general foreign policy) volumes of every U.S. administrations' collections from 1913 (Woodrow Wilson) to 1989 (Ronald Reagan) were analysed for this dissertation. The series also includes some intelligence products from the CIA and many electronic copies of documents from each administration's presidential libraries (located all over the country), such as meeting minutes and letters between Iranian and American leaders and other officials that provide crucial insights into their interactions and viewpoints. This was especially useful in Chapter Three for detailing strategic conversations between the Shah, Nixon (and later Ford), and Kissinger about Afghanistan. The one drawback to FRUS is that it does not include a complete record of declassified American diplomatic materials during the periods the collections cover; rather, it is heavily reviewed, curated, and organised into thematic volumes and editorialised by the Office of the Historian.[13]

As CREST and the eFOIA Library clearly show, there is now a plethora of historical American intelligence products available online for public use. Luckily, there is an advanced search engine for navigating internal keywords within the numerous files and limiting files by publication date, making identifying and analysing the records a more manageable prospect. The intelligence products from

[13] U.S. Department of State, 'About the Foreign Relations of the United States Series,' <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/about-frus>; 'Status of the Foreign Relations of the United States Series,'<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/status-of-the-series>[9 March 2018].

both these collections (which are drawn from the entire Intelligence Community, not just the CIA)[14] are some of the most revealing sources in this dissertation. As will be seen in the chapters, their information, gleaned from human assets and intercepted communications in both countries, often paints a fuller picture of events on the ground in places and situations not always accessible by diplomats in capital-city embassies or officials in Washington. For that reason, they are a useful complement to the official-level diplomatic exchanges detailed in the FRUS series or in the wider diplomatic archives held by NARA and the National Security Archive.

NARA at College Park was mainly used to analyse a wider body of State Department cables and other documents during the above-mentioned administrations that were not always included in the FRUS series, many of which detailed key interactions with Iranian and Afghan officials. NARA also makes use of an advanced computer-based search tool, the Access to Archival Databases (AAD) from which records can be downloaded electronically, but at the time of this research, access to these archives was restricted to on-site at the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress was also used to access the Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), the digitised version of many of the archival materials housed at George Washington University's National Security Archive (though some other institutions can now also access it remotely). The DNSA contains a mixture of American foreign policy archives from the State Department, the White House, and the intelligence agencies that may not be available on the aforementioned collections because many of them were declassified and released as a result of FOIA requests.[15] In addition, there are a number of physical records at the National Security Archive at George Washington University, some of which have been donated by former American officials and are not digitised for inclusion in the DNSA. For this dissertation, four several-hundred document volumes of undigitised records related to Afghanistan were examined.

The CRRC was a unique American archive in terms of the type of records it contained. Created by the Secretary of Defense in 2010, it holds 'records captured

[14] These include agencies like the National Security Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research.
[15] National Security Archive, 'About the National Security Archive,' <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/about>[9 March 2018].

during combat operations from countries, organizations, and individuals, now or once hostile to the United States.'[16] The records are divided between the 'Saddam Hussein Regime Collection' (from Iraq operations) and the 'al Qaeda and Associated Movements Collection' (primarily from Afghanistan operations), and are provided both in their original Arabic, Pashto, or Dari and translated into English.[17] The documents that proved most useful for this dissertation, as seen in Chapter Four, were records from Saddam Hussein's intelligence directorate and his cabinet meetings, which corroborate American intelligence and Afghan media accounts of Iranian activities in Afghanistan during the 1980s. The weaknesses of the archive were twofold: first, the physical archive was unfortunately shut down a week after this scholar researched there in June 2015 due to lack of funding renewal by the Secretary of Defense, leaving little time for its use.[18] Second, because these documents were captured in an operational environment, they do not present the most cohesive chronological or thematic record; they are frequently on a diverse range of topics, and there are large month, or yearlong gaps between some of the relevant records.

Lastly, the United Nation's (UN) Archives and Records Management Section provides a thorough online archive for a wide array of UN documents for this period and topic of research. Organised by UN Secretaries-General terms, secretariat departments, and missions and commissions, the archives provide UN reports, statements of the Secretaries-General, and minutes of UN General Assemblies and related sessions.[19] This dissertation primarily uses UN documents when there were UN-arbitrated disputes between Iran and Afghanistan, when either country gave revelatory speeches during UN sessions, or when they used the UN to bring grievances about the other country. In these ways, it offers a helpful, unbiased record of the official (and harder to come by) viewpoints of the Islamic Republic and Democratic Republic of Afghanistan during certain conflicts with each other.

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[16] CRRC, 'Mission,' <http://crrc.dodlive.mil/about/mission/>; 'Coverage of the CRCC in the New York Times—June 2015,' <http://crrc.dodlive.mil/2015/06/24/coverage-of-the-crrc-in-the-new-york-times-june-2015/>[9 March 2018].
[17] CRRC, 'Collections,' < http://crrc.dodlive.mil/collections/>[9 March 2018].
[18] It is unclear whether the Defense Department still maintains the archive on its servers and whether it will be made available again for public use at the same or different physical location. *New York Times*, 'Archive of Captured Enemy Documents Closes,' 21/6/2015.
[19] United Nations, 'UN Archives,' <https://search.archives.un.org/>[9 March 2018].

Discussed later in Chapter Four, when the UN was deeply involved in finding a diplomatic solution to the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan, many of the parties involved used the UN and the General Assembly as a way to assert their various grievances and accusations of meddling by the other parties.

Iranian and Afghan Primary Sources

While official government records from Iran and Afghanistan (other than those replicated in Western archival materials) were not possible to access due to the aforementioned reasons, several other primary Iranian and Afghan sources were consulted for this dissertation to provide invaluable Iranian and Afghan perspectives on their interactions, as well as relations with the United States and the Soviet Union. Most of these works are memoirs or collections of speeches or interviews of high-level Iranian and Afghan officials. Their key failing, typical for this category of primary sources, lies in the fact that they are personal accounts of events, and therefore the victim of human bias, error, and, at worst, historical revisionism. As is the practice for any historian analysing such sources, when citing their account of events, this dissertation treats their 'factual' content as suspect until corroborated by other sources. However, in certain memoirs, particularly like Assadollah Alam's (discussed below), much of the actions and events described can be corroborated, either by the Western archival record, Afghan media, or other secondary sources. It is noteworthy to mention here that many of the Iranian primary sources used in this dissertation were sourced from the vast Iranian Studies collection at the University of St Andrews Library.

For the first three chapters of this dissertation, the memoirs of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran, were an enlightening look into the Shah's stated perspectives on Iranian history, Iran's role in the world, on foreign policy strategy, and on Afghanistan and the superpowers. This is especially important considering most of the power in pre-revolutionary, Pahlavi Iran was centred on the Shah alone. It was possible to analyse a few of the Shah's memoirs, which have been translated

either from the original Persian, or from French, into English.[20] There was less concern for factual accuracy in the Shah's memoirs than with the other primary sources, as the goal in analysing them was mainly to determine a sense of the Shah's worldview that would inform his decision-making, policy positions, and view of history, rather than his account of events which he lived. Admittedly, the Shah's memoirs still have the limitation of being hostage to what the Shah *wanted* the reader to think were his perspectives versus what they actually were.[21] However, different individuals' memoirs and speeches, some of the Shah's interviews, and other primary and secondary sources have been brought to bear to shed light on any such disparities.

Also in Chapter Three, *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court 1969-1977* by the Shah's minister of court and closest advisor, Assadollah Alam, provided an invaluable view into the internal foreign policy decision-making process in the Shah's Iran due to Alam's close proximity to and relationship with the Shah. The high points of this work are that, unlike the Western archival sources, the motivations for and processes around certain decisions are more readily apparent in this type of source. Again, these are the motivations that that the author of the memoir wanted the reader to discern; nonetheless, they are surprisingly candid and revealing compared with other primary sources. Corroborating aspects of this particular memoir also helped catalyse further research into certain events that held importance to the Iranian-Afghan relationship.[22] The other more obvious issue with this source was, as with any personal diaries, it was at times highly self-congratulatory and occasionally read like a hagiography of the Shah's genius. However, at times Alam could also be bitingly critical of the Shah's and his own actions.

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[20] See, Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza. *Answer to History,* (New York: 1980); *The Shah's Story*, trans. T. Waugh, (London: 1980).

[21] One such example is the Shah's emphasis on having 'peace' and 'good neighborly relations' with his neighbours, when relations with Afghanistan, detailed in Chapter Three, were at times remarkably bellicose and interventionist. Pahlavi, *Answer to History,* p. 131.

[22] For an example, see the discussion in Chapter Three about Iran's relationship with Afghan General Abdul Vali Khan.

Additionally, this dissertation analyses several speeches and interviews given by the Shah, Mohammad Daoud (president of Afghanistan from 1973-1978), and several other high-level government ministers and officials, both Afghan and Iranian. This is also the case for Chapter Four, where translated memoirs were more difficult to find. In order to address this deficiency, several scholarly works are used that present, and analyse, extensive excerpts of the original Persian memoirs of officials like Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri and Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.[23] Some of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's speeches analysed here are from an English-language collection found at the University of St Andrews Library. Translated speeches of many other officials in the Islamic Republic and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, described below, came from online sources and from foreign-media monitoring services. Furthermore, many speeches, statements, and interviews with pre- and post-revolutionary Iranian and Afghan officials are recreated in the Western archival record.

Media Materials and Databases

To further augment the substantial Western archival research presented here with Iranian and Afghan perspectives, over a year was spent conducting analysis of Iranian and Afghan media using foreign-media monitoring services. This was accomplished by accessing the databases of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) and the British Broadcasting Company's (BBC) Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB).[24] FBIS is a foreign media monitoring service that was founded as a private, American organisation in 1941 and later appropriated by the CIA as an open-source intelligence service.[25] The relevant FBIS collection to the research topic for this dissertation was the 'FBIS Daily Reports, 1974-1996' collection, which includes select English-translated Iranian, Afghan, and Soviet/Russian radio, television, and print media transcripts for each day of the years indicated. Similar to an electronic archival

[23] In particular, Sussan Siavoshi's *Montazeri: The Life and Thought of Iran's Revolutionary Ayatollah* and Ashfon Ostovar's *Vanguard of the Imam: Religion, Politics, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards*.
[24] Utilizing these resources required archive-style research due to limited institutional access at the Library of Congress in Washington, among other locations.
[25] CIA, 'Foreign Broadcast Information Service: Chapter 1 – Early Beginnings,' 11/8/2009, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/foreign-broadcast-information-service/>[9 March 2018].'

database, FBIS has an advanced search mechanism that can distinguish key words within the transcripts' texts, and narrow the field by country, region, and publication or air date. This proved incredibly useful for a frequent accounting of events in local media that may not have garnered the attention of Western diplomats and intelligence services or made it into Iranian or Afghan officials' speeches or interviews. FBIS greatly expanded its monitoring capabilities over time, which resulted in far more Iranian and Afghan media coverage in the daily reports of the later years analysed here.[26] As such, Chapter Four, covering the 1980s, makes significant use of FBIS to corroborate some of the activities of the Afghan *mujahidin* (resistance fighters), especially their interactions with Iranian officials.

Similarly, the BBC SWB, is a collection of foreign-media transcripts compiled by the BBC Monitoring Service. Founded in the interwar era (1939) BBC Monitoring was established by the British government for the purpose of 'understanding how Germany and its allies were using radio broadcasts for news and propaganda during World War II.'[27] Like FBIS, the SWB came to include English-language transcripts from several Iranian and Afghan media sources, and therefore has equal advantages from this standpoint. However, its principal drawback is that its files have not been digitised or carefully indexed, creating a tedious process for a researcher to find the most relevant articles for their topic. Because access to the relevant collection (Part 4: The Middle East and Africa) covering the period of research was only available at The Library of Congress in microform, this source was used much more sparingly than the electronic FBIS database.

[26] Readex [the database provider], 'Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports, 1941-1996,' <http://www.readex.com/content/foreign-broadcast-information-service-fbis-daily-reports-1941-1996>[9 March 2018]
[27] BBC, 'About BBC Monitoring,' <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/>[9 March 2018].

Chapter One: The Conceptual Framework for Iran's Role in Afghanistan

> No people can live in the past—not even in its own past. But if it no longer has a link with its history, it must of necessity perish. Persia, which under our dynasty became Iran, has a past which is singularly crowded with hardship and glory, ordeals and hopes. With the help of the Almighty, the lessons of the past constitute the best guide for the citizens of the future. Ours is a very old country….Situated in that part of the Middle East which was the cradle of the great Western civilizations, we find ourselves at the crossroads which unite Europe and Asia, the Indian sub-continent and Africa….*Therein lies the strength of our position which allowed us, during the great moments in our history, to conquer, trade with, influence and civilize neighbouring countries.*
>
> Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, 1979[28]

> How can a small power like Afghanistan, which is like a goat between these lions [Britain and Tsarist Russia], or a grain of wheat between two strong millstones of the grinding mill, stand in the midway of the stones without being ground to dust?
>
> Abdur Rahman Khan, 1900[29]

Introduction

The catalyst for this research was a lack of scholarship examining the history of Iranian-Afghan relations and the motivations for Iranian influence in Afghanistan, a country that has traditionally been of great geopolitical significance in the strategic calculations of many powerful states. Central to the topic explored in this work is a historical understanding of Afghanistan's strategic geographical importance: what made relations with and influence in Afghanistan so important for regional and great powers alike? Afghanistan has consistently been situated geographically as a 'buffer state' between two expansionist superpowers: first, imperial Russia and colonial Britain, and later, the Soviet Union and the United States.[30] However, this in itself is insufficient for understanding the interactions between Iran, Afghanistan, and the

[28] Emphasis added. Pahlavi, *The Shah's Story*, p. 15.
[29] Dupree, Louis. *Afghanistan*, (Princeton: 2014), p. 415.
[30] See the Historical Background of this section for a more detailed account. Trygve Mathisen defines a buffer state as a 'small independent state lying between two larger, usually rival, states (or blocs of states),' in Mathisen, Trygye. *The Functions of Small States in the Strategies of the Great Powers*, (Oslo: 1971). Scholars Thomas Barfield and Amalendu Misra provide thorough historical analyses of Afghanistan's geographical importance. See, Barfield, Thomas. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History,* (Princeton: 2010), pp. 42-56; Misra, Amalendu. 'The Curse of Geopolitics,' in *Afghanistan: The Labyrinth of Violence,* (Cambridge: 2004), pp. 14-40.

great powers. As such, the discussion will shift later in this chapter to the conceptual framework of this dissertation: the existence of strong myths that inform Iranian historical consciousness, the materialisation of this into the ideology of Iranian nationalism, and the impact these myths and nationalism have on Iranian foreign policy behaviour.

Because this work seeks to begin filling the void in in the academic literature of a long view of Iranian-Afghan relations, crucial to addressing this gap requires a perspective that acknowledges the importance of Afghanistan's ancient and inextricable ties with Iran—as parts of modern-day Afghanistan existed under Persian control for over 2,500 years—and how the vast body of Persian history influences modern Iran's political behaviour.[31] Therefore, in order to conduct an analysis on the nature of the Iranian-Afghan relationship and how it fits into Iran's wider strategic goals, there are several concepts crucial for understanding Iran's collective identity and how that influences the country's foreign relations, particularly a neighbour such as Afghanistan. Key to this are parts of the discourse in the fields of history and philosophy that examine the intersection between myth, history, identity, and ideology.

The term 'history' can be described as the modern social science of History, a unbiased account of the past based on vetted facts,[32] or as the social construction of narrative histories of the past that have a chronological and factual basis.[33] 'Myth', however, is considered to be the contrary: a moral or cultural story of the past, frequently the subject of personal interpretations in its recitation, which may contain some facts but no concrete historical chronology.[34] As the field of History became a social science in the nineteenth century with increasingly specific methodology to ensure historical accuracy through the validation of facts, myth was largely disregarded as a part of historical discourse.[35] However, myth saw a resurgence in the

[31] Clements, Frank A and Adamec, Ludwig W. *Conflict in Afghanistan: An Enyclopedia,* (Santa Barbara: 2003), p.253.
[32] Ansari, Ali M. 'Persia in the Western Imagination' in Vanessa Martin (ed*.), Anglo-Iranian Relations since 1800 Royal Asiatic Society Books,* (London, 2005), pp. 1, 12.
[33] Finley, M. I. 'Myth, Memory and History,' in *History and Theory IV* (1965), p. 285.
[34] *Ibid*, p. 298.
[35] Ansari, "Persia in the Western Imagination", p. 1.

study of societies with pre-modern histories due to these histories' abundance of myth: a theoretical debate began over whether history *and* myth can be considered valid historical narratives and whether this would class them as more mythic or historic.[36] Thus, when studying Iran, with its past rooted in ancient Persia—the histories of which were not recorded in the chronological, archival, and factual way that would meet the criteria of the modern field of History— this debate is particularly important.[37]

Most relevant to the research presented here, philosopher Paul Ricoeur, some of whose work focuses on the role of myth in hermeneutics, asserts that myths have utility in 'providing grounds for the ritual actions of men today.'[38] According to Ricoeur, myths come from societies' unique historical experiences and, in their perpetuation, continue to reshape history around these foundational myths. In Ricoeur's words:

> The kinds of myths upon which our societies are founded have themselves this twofold characteristic: on one hand, they constitute a certain system of simultaneous symbols which can be approached through structuralist analysis; but on the other hand, they have a history, because it is always through a process of interpretation and re-interpretation that they are kept alive. Myths have a historicity of their own….Therefore just as societies are both structural and historical, so also are the mythical nuclei which ground them.[39]

Therefore, Ricoeur posits that understanding a society's historically formulated myths is core to understanding a society's identity, which bears on how individuals in that society behave. This would lead one to ask: how does this happen? The answer lies in the transformation of a myth (or multiple myths) to one or more ideology.

'Ideology,' like myth, is a difficult term whose definition has been widely debated. However, for the purpose of this study, scholar Ben Halpern's definition is

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[36] This debate is thoroughly described in Finley, 'Myth, Memory and History,' pp. 281-302.
[37] Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism,* p. 17.
[38] Ricoeur, Paul and Kearney Richard. 'Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds,' in *The Crane Bag*, Vol. 2, No. 1/2, The Other Ireland (1978), pp. 112-118. For a definition of hermeneutics and a survey of the field, see, Ramberg, Bjørn and Gjesdal, Kristin. 'Hermeneutics,' in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 22/6/2016, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/hermeneutics/>[10 March 2018]
[39] Ricoeur and Kearney, 'Myth as the Bearer,' p. 113.

helpful in drawing a distinction between myth and ideology: 'Myth…is an area where beliefs arise and social consensus is established' and ideology as the 'function of beliefs, is a zone of rational communication and social competition.'[40] In this way, myths inform the creation of ideologies, something Ricoeur's work also advances. Without using the term 'ideology,' he notes that at best, myths can guide the foundation of a community, and at worst, can be perverted into such things as 'chauvinistic nationalism' and 'racism.'[41] Additionally, Ali Ansari argues that the further professionalization of History, with its exhaustive methodological imperative to provide an objective and complete version of history, heralded in a reversion of historical facts into simplified myths that then served as ideological tools to promote the concept of the nation.[42]

Few scholars have discussed the importance of myth, history, and ideology in relation to modern Iran, and the works of Iranists Ali Ansari and Richard Cottam are essential to this subject. Both scholars highlight the centrality of the development and perpetuation of the dominant ideology of nationalism in modern Iran. 'Nationalism' here can be defined as a political ideology through which a society expresses a collective cultural identity in a geographic area that can be considered a state.[43] As we have established, identity is crucial to ideologies in that many myths, historical events, and cultural practices can influence how a society might come to define the community (in this case nation) to which it belongs. Ansari discusses at length the importance of myths specific to the Iranian historical experience as informative for Iran's 'pervasive' ideology of nationalism, resulting in motivating Iranian actions based on the country's pre-Islamic history.[44] Importantly, Ansari also argues that even though regimes in modern Iran have changed their ideological orientations (i.e. from the Pahlavi Dynasty's dictatorial 'constitutional monarchies' to the Islamic

[40] Halpern, Ben. '"Myth" and "Ideology" in Modern Usage,' in *History and Theory,* Vol. 1, No. 2 (1961) pp. 137, 143.
[41] Ricoeur and Kearney, 'Myth as the Bearer,' p. 115.
[42] Ansari, *Modern Iran*, p. 13.
[43] Ansari, *Modern Iran,* p. 15; Cottam, Richard W. *Nationalism in Iran,* p. 3.
[44] And history's reinforcement of those myths. Ansari, *Modern Iran*, pp. 16-20; Also see, 'Introduction' in Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism*, pp. 35.

Republic), their continuity lies in an espousal of Iranian nationalism. In reference to this he writes:

> Whether the product of cynical manipulation, or a consequence of sincere adherence, 'nationalism' in all its manifestations has been the ideological reference point to which all competing ideologies have ultimately had to adhere, and within which most have been subsumed.[45]

Ansari discusses many myths that shape Iranian nationalism, and therefore Iranian behaviour. However, this dissertation asserts that two perpetual myths underlie Iranian regional foreign policy behaviour: the 'Myth of the Great Civilisation,' which Ansari has detailed in his explorations of Iranian nationalism, and the 'Myth of Foreign Domination,' based on concepts founded in the works of Ervand Abrahamian and R.K. Ramazani. As will be described below, both myths are interrelated and reinforce each other, leading to powerful behavioural consequences.

'Myth of the Great Civilisation'

Ansari presents Mohammad Reza Shah's emphasis on creating an Iran in the image of a 'Great Civilisation,' a revisitation of the great accomplishments of pre-Islamic Persian empires and Iran's 3000-year-old history, as a manifestation of Iranian nationalism based on powerful myths. This informed the Shah's actions in the creation of the 'White Revolution' to modernize Iran, restoring it to its former grandeur, under his 'revolutionary,' dynastic leadership.[46] Ansari describes several myths that the Shah relied upon in order to pursue the larger myth of a 'great civilisation.' One was the 'Myth of the Saviour'—springing from his father's role as the 'saviour' of Iran in bringing it out of archaic mismanagement and into modernity, as well as a cultish obsession with the greatness of pre-Islamic Persian emperor Cyrus—in which the Shah would heroically advance Iran to be a leading civilisation as Cyrus and his father once had.[47] In so doing, Ansari argues, the Shah had manipulated myths core to the Iranian experience into an ideological nationalism

[45] Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism*, p. 1.
[46] Ansari, Ali M. 'The Myth of the White Revolution: Mohammad Reza Shah, "Modernization" and the Consolidation of Power.' Middle Eastern Studies 37, No. 3 (2001), pp. 3, 15.
[47] Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism*, pp. 21-22, 167.

centred on himself: 'the Shah had become "Emperor."'[48] Ansari says that nationalism, with these mythical underpinnings, continued into the Islamic Republic through Khomeini's similar personalisation of power, using the Shah's 'ideational and material infrastructure.' This helps to explain the continuity in multiple Iranian leaders' push toward reinstating Iran as a 'great civilisation,' centred on Iranian imperial leadership, which created a clear irony for an Islamic republic that asserted itself as democratic and opposed to imperialism.[49] While Ansari focuses primarily on the spread of nationalism in Iran's intellectual discourse and its important domestic consequences, this work highlights the visible relevance of the 'Myth of the Great Civilisation,' and its related myths, to the nationalism that modern Iranian leaders used to pursue a dominant regional foreign policy centred on Iranian regional leadership. As such, the first chapter of this dissertation will detail how this concept, seen partially in Iran's assertion of ownership over Afghanistan since it had historically part of Persia, informs Iran's political and military motivations for and interactions with Afghanistan. This will deeply contextualize the rest of this work's discussions on the contemporary relationship.

'Myth of Foreign Domination'

Another important myth influences Iranian nationalism and Iran's regional foreign policy behaviour: the 'Myth of Foreign Domination,' the name of which is created here but the concept is based on the work of R.K. Ramazani and Ervand Abrahamian. A core part of nationalism—and Iran's nationalism is no different—is that, as an ideology, it is based on myths that are distinctly Iranian and not those of outsiders. Therefore, core to nationalism is distinguishing between the 'self' and the 'other,' and, indeed, to protect the self from the other. To quote Ricoeur:

> It is only when it is threatened with destruction from without or from within, that a society is compelled to return to the very roots of its identity: to that mythical nucleus which ultimately grounds and determines it....In this way, we become aware of our basic capacities and reasons for surviving, for being, and continuing to be what we are.[50]

[48] Ibid. p. 174.
[49] Ibid. pp. 181, 197.
[50] Ricoeur and Kearney, 'Myth as the Bearer,' p. 114.

In relation to Iran, Ansari remarks that the increase in Iranian exposure to powerful Western nations in the nineteenth century, coinciding with the rise of European power and decline of Iranian power, was a driver for an increased focus on Iranian nationalism.[51]

As established—because myth and ideology are informed by historical experience, and in turn, history informs myths that simplify into ideologies—Iran's interactions with outside, powerful nations did much to create a lasting mythology of fear of domination of Iran by outsiders that is both based in Iran's concern over the 'other' and also Iran's negative experiences with the aggression of great powers in its region. Though he does not expressly use the terms 'mythology' or 'ideology,' renowned Iranist Ervand Abrahamian refers to this concept as 'the paranoid style in Iranian politics,' which amounts to a prevalence of a 'conspiratorial interpretation of politics' that developed in Iranian political discourse much more than it did in the West.[52] While Abrahamian generally discusses this concept in reference to Iranian paranoia in its domestic politics, he acknowledges that the paranoia manifests in all ranges of Iran's political relationships, domestic and foreign, and that it is a phenomenon that most affects Iran's political elite.[53] Important to its application for Iran's foreign relations, Abrahamian states that the paranoid style in Iranian politics has its roots in the imperial domination of Iran and the region in the 1800s: this is seen in Persia's concern that the great powers were trying to subjugate it and the great-power perception of Persia as suspicious of others and heavily involved in political intrigues.[54] These imperial perceptions of what Abrahamian calls a 'national culture,'[55] were certainly Orientalist and at times racist in their overly simplistic categorisation of qualities that applied universally to *all* Persians. However, Abrahamian adds that there came to be some truth to the generalisation of Iranian

[51] Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism*, p. 31.
[52] Abrahamian, 'The Paranoid Style in Iranian Politics' in *Khomeinism*, p. 112.
[53] Ibid, p, 120.
[54] Ibid, p. 113-14
[55] Ibid.

paranoia, perhaps a self-fulfilling prophesy in the way that the colonists and Persians treated and perceived one another.[56]

In terms of the expression of paranoid politics on Iran's foreign relationships, Abrahamian describes a perpetual state of suspicion, animosity, and competition with the great powers in Iran's direct region due to the imperial powers' history of meddling in regional affairs and, in Iran's opinion, their desire to weaken the Iranian state by controlling it internally.[57] Illustrated across all the chapters of this dissertation, and the reason it is so termed a 'Myth of Foreign Domination' is that there is historical truth to the myth and, therefore, the root cause of the paranoia of Iranians (behaviour). Chapter Two will further detail how historical events informed this myth: in the nineteenth century, imperial powers dominated the region, controlling even the extent to which Persia and Afghanistan could interact, in order to advance their own interests. Due to Britain and Russia's interest in Afghanistan, and especially in Britain's rejection of Persian influence in Afghanistan, Persia's paranoia of imperial domination clearly motivated it to influence Afghanistan politically and militarily as a way to circumvent Western control and pursue its own interests. In this way, the 'Myth of Foreign Domination' is interrelated to the 'Myth of a Great Civilisation' in that both myths reinforce each other: Iranian nationalism calls for Iran to pursue its once-great regional position, which is made even more necessary by the desire of encroaching 'others' (great powers) to dominate the region and threaten Iran's greatness.

R.K. Ramazani, who wrote one of the seminal works on Iranian foreign policy, highlights the interplay between these two myths. According to Ramazani, in the nineteenth century,

> Iran's acknowledgements of its losses and its acceptance of its diminished frontiers did not necessarily mean recognition of its position as a weak state. The shahs were still Shahinshah, King of Kings, and Iran continued as an 'empire.' The empire had died, but the myth survived. The ever present past with its real as well as its mythological glories lived on. The lure of this past

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, p. 129-30; See also, the similarly termed 'Myth of Foreign Conspiracy' which details the latter aspect, Iran's pervasive concern with the *internal* meddling of superpowers (versus the Iranian preoccupation with great powers' regional meddling discussed here). Blout, E. 'Soft War: Myth, nationalism, and media in Iran,' in *The Communication Review*, Vol. 20. No. 3, pp. 213-216.

> was a powerful influence in Iran's foreign policy whether it led to the imperialist expansion of Nadir Shah, the irredentism of Fath Ali Shah, or the boundary hagglings of Nasir al-din Shah.[58]

Put simply, Ramazani highlights how Iran's experiences with colonial power domination and the importance of myth to Iran led to its persistent adherence to some form of expansionism or irredentism throughout two centuries of Iranian foreign policy decision-making.

Chapter Two details the history of Persian control of Afghanistan, its loss of control and the independence of the Afghan state, and subsequent Iranian irredentist attempts to regain parts of Afghan territories in the nineteenth century, all of which contributes to a framework for the modern Iranian-Afghan relationship as a legacy of Afghanistan's millennia-long incorporation into parts of the Persian Empire.

Having had Afghanistan as part of Persia, Iran has historically employed the use of shared cultural and ethno-linguistic heritage to spread its influence in Afghanistan, in what amounts to a non-physical, political/cultural irredentism. By the time modern Afghanistan came into existence, Persia and Afghanistan had long shared a political-cultural tradition that anthropologist Robert Canfield refers to as 'Turko-Persian,' with Turko-Persia defined as a geographic entity covering the lands from eastern Iraq through the Iranian plateau to India and from Central Asia to the Indian Ocean.[59] In terms of socio-political commonalities, Canfield suggests that Iran and Afghanistan share a 'common city-based Persianate culture interwoven with the legacy of the formerly nomadic Turkish ruling dynasties that came to dominate the region from the eleventh through the nineteenth centuries.'[60] Persia and Afghanistan's nomadic, tribal versus sedentary, urban parts of society gave the societies similar socio-political structures for centuries up through the 1800s: both states' modern governments were founded as tribe-based feudal systems that were ruled by dynastic monarchies in which the ruler's power was limited outside of the capital and main urban centres.[61] Much like Afghanistan, before the twentieth

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[58] Ramazani, R.K. *The Foreign Policy of Iran, A Developing Nation in World Affairs, 1500-1941*, pp.
[59] Canfield, Robert L. *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*. (Cambridge, 1991), pp. xi-xiv.
[60] Barfield, *Afghanistan*, p. 10.
[61] Tapper, Richard. *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (London: 1983), p. 12.

century, less than 10% of Iranians were living in cities and the rest were rural people, many of which harboured strong tribal ties.[62] As discussed throughout this work, Persia (and later Iran) developed these tribal ties in hopes of controlling important geographical areas in Afghanistan by appealing to the Afghan tribes of Persian descent in order to gain their loyalty.[63]

In addition to socio-political constructs, Iran and Afghanistan have an important religious link that Iran has also historically utilized to shift the Afghan relationship in its favour. As Turko-Persian, Islamicate cultures, both societies emanated from the convergence of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish cultural elements in the ancient regions of Khorasan and Transoxiana, areas that border what was Persia and what became Afghanistan.[64] Due to this, many Persian ethnic tribes in western and central Afghanistan have historically been Imami Twelver Shi'a, the same variation of Shi'a Islam practiced by the vast majority of Iranians, some of which include the ethnic Hazara people of central Afghanistan and the Qizilbash.[65] Today at least fifteen per cent of the Afghan population are Shi'a Muslims, which constitutes around two per cent of the global Shi'a population, while, in contrast, Iran's majority Shi'a population accounts for over a third of the global Shi'a population.[66] As discussed in Chapter Four, Iran's ideological reorientation to an Islamic Republic caused it to prioritise the spread of its influence over the region's Shi'a Muslims, and this has been, and continues to be an obvious and contentious way in which Iran exercises its influence in Afghanistan.[67]

The same motivation is equally clear in Iranian influence of Afghanistan's Persian-speaking population, an aspect of the contemporary relationship that also has

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[62] Martin, Vanessa. *The Qajar Pact: Bargaining, Protest and the State in Nineteenth- Century Persia. (London: 2005)*. pp. 15-16.
[63] See, Chapter Three 'Dominating Daoud' and Chapter Four 'Iranian Support for the Afghanistan-based Resistance.' Ibid, p. 22.
[64] Canfield, *Turko-Persia,* p. 1.
[65] Rubin, Barnett R. *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System.* (New Haven: 1995, 2002), p. 38.
[66] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. 'Mapping the Global Muslim Population – Map: More than a Third of the World's Shi'a Muslims Live in Iran.' October 2009. <http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/Mapping-the-Global-Muslim- Population%288%29.aspx>.
[67] Maijdyar, Ahmad. 'Iran Wields Soft Power in Afghanistan.' American Enterprise Institute. 25 Janurary 2013. < http://www.aei-ideas.org/2013/01/iran- wields-soft-power-in-afghanistan/>.

a historical basis from Afghanistan's inclusion in the Persian Empire. While the tribes that dominated pre-nineteenth-century Persia and Afghanistan had their own specific languages and cultures, historians assert that Persian was the language used and understood most commonly in Persia and Afghanistan in the nineteenth century.[68] As such, Persianate culture, most prevalent in the urban areas, often proved as a stronger and more pervasive overlay to the coexisting tribal cultures.[69] Therefore, language has historically served as a method by which Persia could extend its cultural reach into the frontier zones of its empire, which included Afghanistan.[70] This is evidenced by the cultural ownership taken by Afghans, Tajiks, and Turkmen of the Persian *Shahnameh*, a strong testament to the existence of a shared pre-Islamic cultural heritage in the region. The importance of acquiring Persian-language skills as a means for accessing Persian culture was historically considered as fashionable and a status symbol for non-Persians in Afghanistan.[71]

Another indication of the dominance of Persianate ethnolinguistic culture in the region was documented by Percy Sykes, who wrote one of the most comprehensive early histories of Persia in 1915. He noted that during the nineteenth century, 'the written language and literature [in Afghanistan were in] Persian, which [was] spoken by all Afghans of consideration.'[72] This continues today: it is estimated that over half of Afghanistan's population speaks Persian, or a dialect of Persian called Dari, including the Hazaras, Qizilbash, Tajiks, Chahar Aimaq and other non-Pashtun minorities. These ethnic groups are often defined by this shared trait, referred to as the *Farsiwan*, literally meaning, 'Persian speakers.'[73] Thus, in addition to the ability of a shared language to unify these societies by transmitting religious, cultural, and socio-political norms, it can also have the effect of dividing societies on a near-ethnic basis. As Tapper notes, throughout modern Afghan history, the main cleavage in Afghan society was not between tribal or ethnic groups but between the people believing themselves to be 'Pathans' (Pashtuns, Afghans) and the rest, who constitute

[68] Tapper, *Tribe and State,* p. 11.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Canfield, *Turko-Persia,* p. 18
[71] Ibid, p. 7.
[72] Sykes, Percy. *A History of Persia, Volume II*. (London: 1930), p. 217.
[73] Barfield, *Afghanistan*, p. 27-29.

the Farsiwan.[74] This has had key ramifications for the Iranian-Afghan relationship from the creation of the Afghan state to the present day. It is also an important observation for understanding the heavy focus of the 'Af/Pak' narrative in today's scholarship and the need for understanding the Iranian side of the coin.

While the shared ethno-linguistic, socio-political, and cultural heritage of Persia and Afghanistan has assisted Iran in attempts to assert its influence over Afghanistan, it is also important to note the differences between the two states that have historically been exacerbated by external actors in order to mitigate Iranian influence in Afghanistan and to control the Iranian-Afghan relationship. Though there are ethnic similarities between some Afghans and Persians (especially in tribes with ethnically Iranian heritage in Western Afghanistan), the majority of the Afghan population is ethnically Pashtun and speak Pashto, a fact that does not lend itself well to Iranian influence. In addition, with only 15% of Afghans practising Shi'a Islam, the majority of Afghans are Sunni Muslims and do not share a religious tie with Iran. Historically, these areas of difference have caused sectarian rifts between the two states that are typical of the Sunni-Shia divide. Discussed subsequently, it was these religious differences that catalysed the initial Afghan invasion of Persia as well as the independence of the Afghan state.[75] As such, modern attempts by Iran to mitigate these differences by building ties cross-sectionally, through language with a majority of Afghans as well as through ethno-religious similarities with Afghanistan's minorities, is very much a part of the cultivation of an Iranian comparative advantage in Afghanistan that is grounded in both societies' early histories.

Conclusion

The conceptual framework of this dissertation draws on two myths core to Iranian nationalism (the 'Myth of the Great Civilisation' and the 'Myth of Foreign Domination') and how they frame Iran's regional foreign policy behaviour. This framework explains the consistency in Iran's policy toward Afghanistan, as seen across several different Iranian regimes. Because these myths are both based in, and

[74] Tapper, *Tribe and State,* p.12.
[75] Axworthy, Michael. *The Sword of Persia: Nader Shah, from Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant*. (London: 2006), p. 38.

reinforced by historical experience, Chapter Two describes how Iran's interactions with superpowers involved in the region motivated Iran, in view of its relations with Afghanistan, to tip the regional equation in its favour due to the domination it had endured during the colonial period. As the subsequent chapters of this dissertation show, Iran's pursuit of influence in Afghanistan that it could leverage—the development of a comparative advantage—was one of the successful ways in which a medium power with leadership ambitions could re-establish its desired regional role, while competing with the superpowers on a slightly more equal playing field.

Chapter Two: Early Perso-Afghan Relations and Great-Power Domination of Iran and Afghanistan (1747-1941)

> In the contemplation of the kingdoms and principalities of Central Asia, no question, to my mind, is comparable in importance with the part which they are likely to play or are capable of playing in the future destinies of the East. Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia—to many these names breathe only a sense of utter remoteness or a memory of strange vicissitudes and of moribund romance. To me, I confess, they are the pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the dominion of the world.
>
> Lord George Nathaniel Curzon[76]

> Indeed what is more remarkable about the Iranians encountered by the Europeans in the nineteenth century was not so much an absence of historical consciousness, but an *excess* of it. The Iranian elites appeared supremely self-confident and convinced of the importance and longevity of their kingdom, which they declared was the 'oldest seat of dominion.'
>
> Ali Ansari[77]

Introduction

This chapter details the interactions between Persia and Afghanistan, from the creation of the Afghan state to the end of Reza Shah's reign, and both states' experiences with British and Russian colonial intervention that were pivotal in shaping modern Iranian-Afghan relations. In order to understand the motivations that have driven Iranian foreign policy toward Afghanistan and the wider foreign policy pertinence of Afghanistan to Iran, this chapter will first review the history of Persian control of Afghanistan, how losing that control in 1722 compelled an irredentist Iranian response that began thereafter but has persisted since, the deeply damaging effects of foreign intervention in both countries' internal and external affairs in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how all of these things actually created the framework within which the modern Iranian-Afghan relationship functions. It is argued here that those experiences culminated in the eventual creation of an ambitious regional foreign policy by Reza Shah—deeply inspired by Iranian nationalism and fear of foreign domination—that necessitated influence over

[76] Curzon, Lord George Nathaniel. *Persia and the Persian Question*. (London: 1892), pp. 3-4.
[77] Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism*, p. 19-20.

Afghanistan. This paved the way for more adventurist Iranian policies toward Afghanistan and the region in the decades that followed.

The Role of Afghanistan in Persia's Fall from Regional Dominance

The independence of Afghanistan was made possible by arguably the most traumatic event in modern Iran's history, the toppling of the great Safavid Empire, which was initiated by a then-Persian frontier tribe of Ghilzai Afghans from Kandahar in 1722. The fall of the Safavids came with a lasting set of consequences, as before the Afghan invasion the empire had for over 100 years (since expelling the Portuguese from the region with British help) been at the height of its regional dominance.[78] Therefore, Afghanistan's invasion of Persia and subsequent entrance into statehood in 1747 marked the end of the Safavid Empire and of Persia's halcyon period of regional dominance.[79] This section will illustrate how the ultimately unsuccessful struggle Persia waged with the Afghans over the latter's independence was a blow to the cultivated Persian 'myth of the great civilisation.' It subsequently motivated Persia's irredentism to regain the lands it lost to the Afghans as well as the regional status that it had lost at the hands of the Afghans.

In order to understand the seriousness of the loss of Afghanistan to Persia, one must understand that over the entire scope of Persian history, Persia's intermittent control of most of Afghanistan for over a millennia illustrates a significant part of Iranian motivations regarding their relationship with Afghanistan. The geographic region considered to be modern-day Afghanistan was part of Persia from as early as 552 BCE, when the Achaemenids ruled Persia and Afghanistan until 486 BCE. With intermittent breaks, Afghanistan was part of Persia from 225 AD–650 AD during the Sassanids, and in the Persianate dynasties of the Tahirids (821–873), the Saffarids and the Samanids (863–999), the Ghaznavids (963–1187), and the Ghorids (1149–1215) until Shah Abbas I ruled parts of Afghanistan from 1571–1629 during the Safavid Empire. During the periods it was *not* ruled by Persia, Afghanistan fell under the authority of several empires invading from the east. Afghanistan spent most of its

[78] Milani, Abbas. 'Iran's Post-Cold War Policy in the Persian Gulf.' *International Journal* 42:2 (1994), p. 329.
[79] Ibid.

history split between Persia and Hindustan, the geographical area represented by modern-day India and Pakistan. In more modern history, Afghanistan was under Persian rule again in 1648, when Abbas II captured Kandahar from the Mughal Empire in 1648, where it remained until the Afghan invasion of Persia in 1722.[80]

The Afghan invasion was made possible by a variety of irregular factors in place at the time. When the Safavid empire saw its demise, Persia was ruled by Shah Soltan Hosein, one in a recent line of lazy, late-Safavid shahs, dually known for his love of drink and his apathy for governance.[81] Under his rule, tribes that had once served loyally as military auxiliaries for the Persian crown, namely the Afghan Ghilzai and Abdali tribes, now had an unprecedented level of de-facto autonomy and fewer provisions from the centralized state.[82] The position of the Afghans on the periphery of Persian society suited their tribal lifestyle. The relationship soon changed when Mir Vais Ghilzai, a prominent member of the Afghan Ghilzai tribe, took a pilgrimage to Mecca, and while there, he obtained a document from the *ulema*[83] declaring that he was to carry out *jihad*[84] on the heretical Shi'a Persians to convert them to Sunnism.[85] During this early period of relations between Afghanistan and Persia, the Sunni/Shi'a divide between Persians and Afghans was a major reason for their hostilities toward one another, a fact that lent itself to the idea that invading Persia would constitute a legitimate religious war.[86] Upon returning to Kandahar with the document calling for *jihad*, Mir Vais was easily able to use sectarianism to persuade his fellow tribesmen to take up arms against the Persians.[87] In addition, Afghan resentment of Persia had already been building due to maltreatment of the Afghans by Gurgin Khan, the Persian court's officer in charge of Kandahar.[88] This began a series of armed confrontations between the Afghans and Persians: first, the

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[80] Adamec and Clements, *Conflict in Afghanistan,* p. 283.
[81] Axworthy, Michael. *Iran: Empire of the Mind: A History from Zoroaster to the Present Day.* (London: 2007), pp.149-50.
[82] Khazeni, Arash. *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran.* (Seattle: 2009), p. 28.
[83] This term refers to the religious leadership.
[84] This term refers to holy war.
[85] Browne, Edward Granville. *A Literary History of Persia.* (Cambridge: 1928), p.121.
[86] Mazzaoui, Michael M. *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors*. (Salt Lake City: 2003), p. 135.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Floor, Willem. *The Afghan Occupation of Safavid Persia, 1721-1729.* (Paris: 1998), p. 24.

Ghilzais retook their home province of Kandahar in 1709 to oust Persian control; then between 1710-1713, Mir Vais built an army of Afghan tribes that defeated Shah Hosein's large Persian armies in several clashes; and lastly, by 1715, Mir Vais was successful in taking the province of Herat from Persia by rallying the support of the powerful Abdali Afghan tribe, historically a bitter rival of the Ghilzais.[89]

Mir Vais and the Afghans occupied a strong position after this victory due to the fact that Herat and Kandahar were some of the most strategically important cities for Persia as main trade hubs on the ancient Silk Road, which had been under Persian control intermittently for centuries, but consecutively from the 1600s onwards.[90] Shortly thereafter, Mir Vais died, and following a brief squabble for succession during which Mir Vais' brother attempted to give Herat back to Persia, Mir Vais' son Mahmud Ghilzai took power of the Afghans. Bent on continuing his father's mission, Mahmud and his forces pressed into Persia to confront the royal court at Isfahan, and by 1722, he had slowly but incontestably taken every major city in his path. At the Battle of Gulnabad in March of 1722, Isfahan finally fell to Mahmud, and by October of that same year, Shah Soltan Hosein surrendered the Persian crown to Mahmud, who then named himself the Shah of Persia. Mahmud ruled Persia with an iron fist, and during his reign the Persians lived in fear and resentment of his control. Mahmud ordered killing rampages on factions of Persian society with which he had disagreements. While the Afghans only ruled Persia for eight years, the consequence of their invasion was plunging Persia into an era of weak governance and internal chaos for much of the remaining years of the eighteenth century.[91]

After this humiliating experience for the once-great Persian Empire, the immediate, irredentist goal of Persia's new leader was to recover some lost regional power. The rise of Nader Quli, later Nader Shah, gave the Persians a fleeting hope of regaining their status before losing a great mass of Persia's lands with the independence of Afghanistan. While southern Persia had been subject to Afghan rule, a Turkic Afsharid empire was beginning in the north. An army general named Nadir

[89] Sykes, *A History of Persia,* p.222.
[90] Floor, *Afghan Occupation,* p. 24.
[91] Axworthy, *Sword of Persia,* pp. 42-43.

Quli was rallying forces in the name of Shah Soltan Husain's son Tahmasp in order to reunite Persia and expel the Afghans. In the meantime, Shah Mahmud's cousin Ashraf was in the process of rallying his own supporters in Kandahar and Herat in order to challenge Mahmud's authority. By 1725, Ashraf staged a coup in the palace at Isfahan and took the throne from Mahmud, a brief transition of power that Nadir Quli took advantage of in order to launch attacks on Ashraf's forces in many Persian provinces. In the Battle of Damgham in 1729, Nadir and his army were able to push Ashraf's forces back to Kandahar, effectively ending Afghan rule of Persia and re-establishing some of Persia's territorial integrity.[92]

Nadir's rule was to be the last bright moment in Persian history in the eighteenth century. He and his army not only reconquered the lands the Afghans had taken for themselves, putting the Afghan tribes back under Persian control, but lands as far as Delhi were usurped in the name of Persia. However, it was the important Silk Road outposts of Herat and Kandahar that displayed the greatest resistance to being returned to Persia. The Heratis staged a resistance against Nadir that killed 10,000 of his men, and Nadir's eventual conquest of Kandahar was only possible because the 40,000-man army of Afghans had run out of supplies one cold winter.[93] By the time Nadir decided to name himself Shah in 1736, he strategically centred his government in Khorasan[94] and eventually deposed what was left of the Afghan state in 1738.[95] This decision not only ensured Persian sovereignty over the economically and politically important city of Herat, but bordering Afghan land also enabled Nadir Shah to keep a closer watch over the Afghans. Cleverly administrating to keep the enemy in check, Nadir made excellent use of Afghan tribal lords, winning their loyalty by promoting them to positions as generals and officers in his army to keep

[92] Malcolm, *History of Persia,* p. 5.
[93] Floor, Willem. *The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah: Dutch East India Company Reports, 1730-1747*. (Waldorf: 2009), pp. 12; 73-74.
[94] Khorasan is a historical name for the geographical area bridging modern-day northeastern Iran, southern Turkmenistan, and northern Afghanistan. Encylopaedia Britannica, 'Khorāsān,' <https://www.britannica.com/place/Khorasan-historical-region-Asia> [8 June 2020].
[95] Axworthy, *Sword of Persia*, p. 112.

them from contesting his rule.[96] At the height of his army, Nadir Shah had co-opted 50,000 Afghan troops, mostly from Herat and Kandahar.[97]

Like many shahs before him, toward the end of his reign, Nadir Shah's methods in ruling the Persians, Afghans, Uzbeks, Georgians, and Indians proved increasingly cruel and tyrannical.[98] He grew more paranoid of subordination in the Persian cities that suffered most under his rule, and in 1747, Nadir Shah decided to plan the assassination of several of his army officers of whom he was suspicious. Having discovered his plan, some of these officers rallied to assassinate the Shah in his tent later in that same year.[99] The death of Nadir Shah provided a unique opportunity for several different factions within Persia to attempt to gain power, not least of which were the Afghans, whose designs for their own empire had not been forgotten.

The way in which Afghanistan eventually extricated itself from Persia and became truly independent was less traumatic for the Persians than the Afghan invasion, but it had equally important consequences for the development of the Perso-Afghan relationship at the turn of the century. The independence of the Afghan state from Persia came as a direct result of Afghan opportunism in filling the power vacuum left in Nadir Shah's wake. Wasting no time, one of Nadir's trusted army officers Ahmed Khan, an Abdali Afghan, rallied Afghan tribal support and regained control of Herat and Kandahar in order to establish Khorasan as a strategic buffer region between the Afghans and Persians.[100] This region was to be ruled by Shah Rukh, considered to be a pawn of the Afghans, a move that kept Khorasan under Afghan influence and under relative peace for the next fifty years.[101] Ahmad Khan went on to consolidate his power by shedding the Abdali tribal name for the name 'Durrani,' which assisted him in uniting the Abdali, Ghilzai and other competing

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[96] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire,* p. 29. Malcolm, *History of Persia,* p. 47.
[97] Hanway, Jonas. *An Historical Account of the British Trade Over the Caspian Sea, Volume I.* (London: 1753), p. 252.
[98] Malcolm, *History of Persia,* pp. 45-6.
[99] Browne, *A Literary History of Persia,* p. 125.
[100] Hanifi, Shah. *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan: Market Relations and State Formation on a Colonial Frontier.* (New York: 2008), p. 2.
[101] Malcolm, *History of Persia,* p. 57; Browne, *A Literary History of Persia,* p. 125; Tapper, *Tribe and State,* p. 16;

Afghan tribes.[102] Durrani's ability to convince the various Afghan tribes to rally against the common enemy of Persia was key to uniting them, and this enabled the Afghans to successfully expel the Persians from the rest of the Afghan lands to create what is now considered the establishment of the modern state of Afghanistan. Then, in a final blow, Ahmad Shah Durrani's empire took up the regional mantle of the Persians, in that it came to include the geographic areas of modern-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Khorasan and Kohistan provinces of Iran, and the Punjab province of India.[103]

In contrast to the Afghan's new regional stance, with the death of Nadir Shah, Persia descended into a state of decay after a series of abortive successions eventually resulted in the brief Zand Dynasty, ruling for an uneventful, but generally peaceful, twenty years. Although the Afghans remained the enemies of the Persians during this period, because of Karim Khan Zand's generous disposition, the Afghans did not view him as a threat and both sides generally left each other alone.[104] After Karim Khan's death in 1779, Persia was unable to avoid another civil war for succession. One of Karim Khan's more distant descendants, Lotf Ali Khan, was able to seize the Persian throne, but he continued to battle with the powerful Qajar tribe throughout his reign.[105] In 1795, the Qajars succeeded in killing Lotf Ali, took the Persian throne and created the Qajar Dynasty.[106]

The eventual stabilization of Persia as one, centralized government after decades of unrest was highly significant for the turn of the century. With domestic turmoil at bay, Aga Mohammad Khan Qajar, and his successor Fath Ali Shah, turned their focus outward and began their dynasty with a precise mission in mind: to recover the lands Persia had recently lost.[107] According to early historian Sir John Malcolm, Aga Mohammad was so eager to recapture Bukhara (north of Afghan land) that he sent an envoy to Kabul in order to make an alliance with Afghanistan in order

[102] Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind,* p. 37.
[103] Malcolm, *History of Persia,* p. 57.
[104] Ibid, p. 64.
[105] Tapper, *Tribe and State,* p. 15.
[106] Ibid, p. 21.
[107] Ibid.

to improve relations by raiding it together; the Afghans agreed to the alliance but had no intention of upholding it.[108]

While the early relationship between Persia and Afghanistan centred on religious tension and the creation of an independent Afghan state, what is crucial to note is that Persia's defeat by the Afghans they once controlled was compounded by the realities of western and eastern imperial expansionism into Persian territory. Beginning in the early 1700s, both Russia and the Ottomans sought to take advantage of a rapidly declining Safavid empire by waging various military campaigns on her northern provinces.[109] Exploiting the threat to Persia caused by the Afghan revolts and their subsequent siege of Isfahan, the Russians and the Ottomans carried out a joint plan and began taking Persia's coveted Caspian provinces during the Russo-Persian War of 1722–23.[110] By the war's end, the Russians and Ottomans leveraged Persia's Afghan problem to pressure Shah Tahmasp, to agree to a treaty in which Persia would formally cede some of their Caspian territories in exchange for Russian and Ottoman assistance in expelling the Afghans from Persia.[111] While Persia had no choice but to uphold its end of the treaty, it became almost immediately clear that Russia and the Ottomans had no intention of ending Afghan rule of Persia.[112] From this period onward, Persia was effectively given notice that it was directly in the crosshairs of the Russian empire's southward expansion.[113] This and other similar occurrences very much informed Iran's obsession with Russian encroachment discussed throughout this work.

At the beginning of the Qajar monarchy in 1796, Persia had some success in attempting to retake a Georgian province in the north that previously belonged to them, but this backfired almost immediately when the Russians swiftly responded by re-annexing Georgia *and* invading Azerbaijan, which was still part of Persia. Therefore, with Persia's territorial integrity and regional dominance threatened on all

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[108] Malcolm, *History of Persia,* p. 297.
[109] Lockhart, Laurence. *The Fall of the Safavī Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia. (Cambridge: 1958)*, p. 218-19.
[110] Sykes*, A History of Persia,* p. 237.
[111] For the full English text of this and subsequent non-British agreements, see Hurewitz, J.C. *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East, Volume I: 1535-1914*. (Princeton: 1956)*,* p. 42.
[112] Browne, *A Literary History of Persia,* p. 122.
[113] Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, p.158.

fronts, Russia's great-power bullying of Persia over the Afghan issue began a trend in which imperial powers, aware of Afghanistan's geopolitical importance, took to marginalizing Persia in order to advance their own interests and regional positions.

This tendency was exacerbated by the growing involvement of the British in the region. Prior to the eighteenth century, the Anglo-Persian relationship was mainly based on their longstanding trade ties that were developed at the founding of the British East India Company in 1600.[114] Trading goods directly with Persia, as well as utilizing Persia's strategic geographical location to transmit goods from the Gulf to Central and South East Asia, remained the key strategy of the British in their relationship with Persia until the eighteenth century.[115] The convenient and mutually beneficial nature of this interaction suffered an extreme change beginning with the Afghan invasion of Persia. From 1722 onwards, British merchants began finding trade in and around Persia more and more impossible with the increased violence and chaos between the Afghans and Persians.[116] As Persia entered the Zand Dynasty, tribal competition between the Zands and the Qajars in the north was so fierce that the central government had almost no jurisdiction there.[117] This further inhibited the British trade relationship and accentuated Russia's unchecked dominance in the north. Following the death of Karim Khan Zand, the trade relationship with the British, as well as other European nations, had come to near standstill, causing severe economic problems for Persia.[118] Once Britain became aware of how their declining trade relationship with Persia could affect the British Empire's power in the region, as it was competing with the French and Russians, there was a shift in understanding that Anglo-Persian relations would begin to be more affected by politics and less concerned with trade.[119]

Therefore, the Afghan invasion of Persia in 1722 and the independence of Afghanistan in 1747 marked a clear turning point in Persia's history because Persia

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[114] Wright, Dennis. *The English Amongst the Persians: Imperial Lives in Nineteenth-Century Iran.* (London: 2001), p. 3.
[115] Hanway, *An Historical Account,* pp. 30-31.
[116] Lockhart, *Fall of the Safavī Dynasty,* p. 412.
[117] Martin, *The Qajar Pact,* p. 22.
[118] Floor, *Afghan Occupation*, pp. 7-8.
[119] Wright, *English Amongst the Persians,* pp. 1-2.

not only lost Afghanistan and its unfettered control of the main eastern trade routes, but it lost many of its other lands at the hands of great powers, and, most importantly, it lost its status as a significant regional power. This set the conditions for Britain and Russia's strategic management of Persia and Afghanistan as a means to protect their regional interests while waging in superpower competition. As Percy Sykes noted in his early history of Persia: more so than Alexander or Tamerlane, Mahmud Ghilzai was the most extraordinary conqueror of Persia. He did not have a ready army at his disposal, but instead, he slowly conquered and collapsed the state, exposing above all else the extent of Persian weakness and cowardice.[120] As it was soon to discover in the nineteenth century, Persia was never to enjoy the same regional dominance that it had before the Afghan invasion, but it would strive all the same. Persia's interactions with the imperial powers and Afghanistan in the 1700s show how the myth of foreign domination and the myth of great civilisation (and their interconnected nature) that underlie Persia's foreign policy behaviour are based in their historical experience, and were further cemented with the events of the nineteenth century.

The Great Game: Great-Power Competition and its Impact on Nineteenth Century Persian-Afghan Relations

Iran's modern-day relationship with Afghanistan has been heavily influenced by the history of great-power dominance over Persia in the nineteenth century as part of the political reality of great-power competition during this era. With the turn of the century marking the formation of both Persia and Afghanistan into their modern iterations, this period was definitive for the development of Perso-Afghan relations as modernizing nation-states. The early nineteenth century saw a shift in the regional politics of the greater Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia in that Anglo-Russian competition for influence and protection of their interests – in India and Central Asia respectively – dominated the political landscape for over a century. This phenomenon came to be known as the "Great Game", during which the imperial prowess of the British and Russians was exerted by establishing competing spheres of

[120] Sykes, *History of Persia*, p. 236.

influence in the region.[121] A successfully dominant stance for the British was entirely contingent upon the security of their position in India: bordering Afghanistan became a strategic lynchpin for much of the nineteenth century, with Britain, Russia, and Persia all vying for control of key areas of Afghanistan for access to India and the Indian Ocean.[122] In the face of this imperial competition, the overwhelming theme for the Persian-Afghan relationship during the nineteenth century was unrelenting Persian antagonism and interventionism toward Afghanistan while the British and Russians sought to gain influence and control there. In the development of strong paranoia over great-power domination during this period, Persia's persisting intention was to regain control over the strategic areas of Afghanistan in order to assert a dominant regional status in competition with the intervening great powers. One can see the direct correlation with Iranian motivations in Afghanistan henceforth, as detailed in each of the chapters of this dissertation. This section will illustrate the key events of the nineteenth century that motivated Persia to utilize both military and political tactics to extend its influence in Afghanistan as a way to counteract growing imperial control of the region. These will include: the early British diplomatic entreaties to Persia and Afghanistan, the growing domination of Persia by Russia, the Persian campaigns against Herat from 1799 to 1857 that culminated in the Anglo-Persian War, and the British arbitration of the Sistan, and other border issues between Persia and Afghanistan from the 1860s onwards.

The surge of British diplomatic activity in the beginning of the nineteenth century set the stage for the British to advance a strong regional position throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, a manoeuvre that eventually led to Britain's ability to exert influence in Afghanistan and control over the Perso-Afghan relationship. As discussed above, to protect their main interests in India, Britain realised they needed political alliances with neighbouring Afghanistan and Persia.[123] The urgency for building these alliances was heightened as Russia took a dominant stance against

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[121] Hopkirk, Peter. The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia. (New York: 1992), pp. 2-3.
[122] Mojtahed-Zadeh, Pirouz. *The Small Players of the Great Game: The Settlements of Iran's Eastern Borderlands and the Creation of Afghanistan*. (London: 2004), p. 2; Curzon, *Persia,* pp. 84-5.
[123] Rawlinson, Sir Henry. *A Memoir of Major-General Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson*. (London: 1898), p. 4.

Persia by successfully annexing several northern Persian provinces in a series of armed conflicts from 1804 to 1813.[124] Consequently, the British sent their first official diplomatic missions to both states at the turn of the century, and successfully drafted treaties of friendship with both Persia and Afghanistan in 1808 and 1809, respectively.[125]

The language and provisions of these early treaties as the official start of relations between these states is very revealing of British intentions with regard to Persia and Afghanistan. Interestingly, the first real point made in the Persian treaty, after engaging in excessive introductory flattery of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar, was to ensure that should the Afghans attempt to take British India, the Persians must promise to build an army to go to war with and destroy Afghanistan.[126] The British tactic to win Persian loyalty against the Afghans in case of an Afghan uprising against India was not only to defer to the Persians on the Afghan issue but also to divide and conquer the Persians and Afghans. Playing to this, the treaty: called the Shah 'holy' and Persians 'almighty,' and it incited him to 'ruin and humble' the Afghans if they attempted to attack Persia or India.[127] Nearly all of the articles in the political (as opposed to the commercial) section of both treaties were dedicated to both Persia and Afghanistan agreeing to bring arms against the other in the event that one side try to threaten British interests in India.[128] In return, Britain offered to provide provisional assistance to both countries if Persia were to attack Afghanistan and vice versa. It is clear in the British conflict of interest present in these original documents that in formulating their new regional policy, the British did not know at first whether they should ally with Persia or Afghanistan. Accounts from officials on the ground corroborate this, as they suggested that the British initially choose an alliance with Persia, breaking their first treaty with the Afghans, by encouraging the Persians to regain control of Herat in order to protect the transport routes through Afghanistan that pass into India.[129] For this reason, and due to India's anxiety, Britain

[124] Busse, Heribert. *History of Persia under Qajar Rule.* (New York: 1972), p. 143.
[125] Kaye, Sir John William. *History of the War in Afghanistan*. (London: 1874), pp. 71, 637, 641.
[126] FO 93/75/1, 'Preliminary Article. Defensive Alliance.'
[127] Ibid.
[128] Kaye, *War in Afghanistan,* pp. 637, 641.
[129] Rawlinson, *Memoir*, p. 6.

incited a Persian siege on Herat, a city which at the time was largely independent and of dubious sovereignty. This did not take much convincing because, as mentioned, the Persians desperately wanted to reclaim 'their' Afghan territories. However, the Persian siege did not succeed; following the attempt, the British did not encourage Persia's many subsequent attempts to conquer Herat.[130]

What the British had not fully realised was the extent to which Imperial Russia was actively encouraging the Persians to stage a continuous series of military advances on Herat for the decades that followed. Within the context of Anglo-Russian competition, the eventual realisation was deeply concerning for the British, who, upon seeing evidence that Russia sent troops to assist the Persians in their endeavours, quickly threw full support behind Afghanistan as a means to protect India.[131] Another possible Russian motive for encouraging Persia to wage their campaigns against Afghanistan was to distract the Qajars from the realities of losing their northern territories to the Tsar.[132] In the aftermath of the Treaty of Gulistan, in which Persia was forced to submit to the will of Russia and relinquish even more of its northern territories, Britain forced Persia to sign a defence treaty in 1814.[133] Article I of the Anglo-Persian treaty contractually obligates Persia to break off any treaties with European powers hostile to Britain (i.e. Russia), to not allow a European power into their territory if they are to invade India, and if a European power were to use routes around Persia to access India, Persia was to use their influence in these areas or a showing of troops in order deter that power.[134] Article VIII continued to protect the British in case the Afghans were to ever threaten India, as it outlined that if the Afghans were to invade India, that Persia must send troops to aid the British. However, in an unreciprocal twist, Article IX states that should there be a Perso-Afghan war that Britain would not interfere unless the two countries requested mediation to effect peace.[135] According to diplomatic historian J.C. Hurewitz, this treaty, which was drafted over the course of five years, was to replace the initial

[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid, pp. 56-7, 67-68, 71.
[132] *Hurew*itz, *Diplomacy,* p. 141.
[133] FO 93/75/3, 'Definitive Treaty. Alliance, etc.'
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

treaty of 1808 that guaranteed British military assistance for Persia in the event of an Afghan conflict with Persia.[136] In this very cautious defensive treaty, it was already becoming clear that Britain did not intend to provide Persia political or military assistance, especially not in regard to Afghanistan, unless Persia was assisting Britain in the defence of India. This change in British behaviour toward the Persians would have only exacerbated Persian paranoia about their involvement in Persia's immediate region.

Yet another historical loss to engrain in the Iranian consciousness Persia's great-power" status was over was Persian humiliation in the signing of the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchai, which forced Persia to give Russia control of previously-Persian lands in the Caucuses. The response to this foreign domination was strong, with a domestic flaring of popular grievances in Persia.[137] The relationships Persia established with these two imperial states came to define an immense decline in Iranian power. Iran's dependence upon the trade and influence of these powers was necessary in order to keep the Iranian economy and legitimacy of the Qajars intact. This dependence materialized in Iran ultimately issuing concessions, tangible economic offerings, and capitulations, in continued, unfair treaties, to the British and Russians.[138] The Qajar's granting of these concessions and capitulations was wildly unpopular within Iran, and this discontent was the primary factor in the development of early Iranian nationalism, as it was a rallying point that mobilised the Iranian public against the threatening Western 'other.'[139]

Persia's military advances on Afghan territories throughout the early to mid-1800s culminated in another devastating loss to Persia in regard to Afghanistan, but rather than losing regional dominance to the Afghans, the Persians were being deprived a strong regional stance by the British. As mentioned, the Qajar dynasty began with Fath Ali Shah embarking on a campaign to regain what Persia had lost in territory and status by attempting to retake the outskirts of its empire. Regaining control of Herat and Kandahar became paramount to Persia, as these cities remained

[136] Hurewitz, *Diplomacy,* p. 86.
[137] Ansari, *Modern Iran,* p. 4.
[138] Keddie, *Modern Iran*, p. 34.
[139] Ansari, *Modern Iran,* p. 4.

important trade routes and were critical for gaining access to India.[140] For this reason, the British became concerned with Persian intentions regarding Afghanistan and India. The British knew that despite Russian pressure, Fath Ali Shah had 'reasons of his own' for raiding Afghanistan, and they were alarmed that the Shah would take such a competitive stance against the British.[141] This was made easier for Persia by the fact that from the turn of the century until 1828, Afghanistan was more a series of loosely allied khanates (Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat).[142] British officers on the ground during this period posited that because Afghanistan seemed to Persia as a government 'without a head' and appeared to the Persians to be 'unoccupied,' they saw it as an advantageous condition under which to attack Afghanistan, and they were counselled by others to do so.[143] In line with the theoretical framework of this work, it has been noted that Persia's approach toward Afghanistan was as if they were masters to Afghan subjects.[144] As such, the British would take a policy of intervention in regard to Persian designs on Afghanistan, and it was because of this that Persia was unsuccessful in its attempts to regain the city of Herat in 1805, 1816, 1833, 1837, and 1856-7.

By 1837, Persian incursions into Afghanistan were a risk that the British could no longer ignore, and the worst of British fears were realized when Persia's attempt on Herat that year had Russian backing.[145] When the British issued stern threats to the Persians and Russians to surrender or prepare for war, the Persians and Russians ultimately abandoned their effort.[146] After the British were sure of Russian collaboration on the 1837 attempt, the British broke off Anglo-Persian diplomatic relations in 1839. British officials in Tehran were exasperated by Persia's unreliability and disinterest in improving relations.[147] Officials on the inside

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[140] Malleson, George B. *History of Afghanistan from the Earliest Period to the Outbreak of the War in 1878*. (London: 1878), ix.
[141] Avery, Peter, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Melville (eds.). *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume VII: From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic,* (Cambridge: 1991), p. 376.
[142] Burnes, *Cabool,* p. 375.
[143] Burnes, *Cabool,* p. 375.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Andreeva, Elena. *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism.* (London: 2007), p. 72.
[146] Rawlinson, *Memoir,* p. 56.
[147] Rawlinson, *Memoir*, p. 69.

suggested that the British handling of the Russian and Persian threat was to use the Afghans to balance their influence regionally and to protect India.[148]

Afghanistan's handling of great-power interference was somewhat different and more successful than Persia's. British intentions in the region regarding Afghanistan were not lost of the Afghans. During the several Persian incursions into Afghan territory, the Afghan leader Dost Mohammad Khan refused to acquiesce to Britain's demand to sever all ties with the Persians and Russians, instead rebelling and initiating a series of diplomatic negotiations with the Russians.[149] In a clear display of panic by the British because of the priority it placed on Afghanistan for the protection of India, Britain invaded Afghan territory in 1838. This marked the beginning of the First Anglo-Afghan War, effectively caused by Russo-Persian competition with the British over Afghanistan. This compelled Britain to install a pro-British ruler to combat the threat from Persia and Russia.[150] The British initially succeeded in reinstalling Shah Shuja, who had been deposed by the Afghans nearly thirty years prior, and under whom the 1809 Anglo-Afghan Treaty was signed. They condemned the unreliable Dost Mohammad Khan to exile in British India in order to keep watch on him and prevent Shuja's overthrow, but uprisings amongst the tribes in Afghanistan made it apparent that after the exit of British troops, Shah Shuja would not remain on the throne for long.[151] The tribes rallied together, assassinating Shah Shuja in 1842 and delivering a massive blow to the British troops attempting to retake control. A clear British defeat, Dost Mohammad Khan came back from exile in British India to rule Afghanistan, and for obvious reasons, this began a chill in Anglo-Afghan relations for some time. As they were to admit later, the British had begun to realize that they could not so easily handle the threat of Persia and Russia by attempting to control the internal or external affairs of Afghanistan.

During the lulls in Anglo-Afghan relations, Persia tried its hand at utilizing political tactics in order to mitigate the influence the British had gained over Afghanistan, revealing that despite many setbacks, their irredentism had not abated.

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[148] Kaye, *War in Afghanistan,* pp. 659-60.
[149] Burnes, *Cabool,* p. 143.
[150] Norris, J.A. *The First Afghan War, 1838-1842.* (Cambridge: 1967), pp. 12-13.
[151] Sykes, *History of Afghanistan*, pp. 11-12; 45.

This began in a period preceding direct Persian and British confrontation during the Anglo-Persian War. The Persian schemes involved sending Afghans loyal to the Persian court to Herat in order to stage political coups to take control of Khorasan for Persia.[152] This is echoed in the autobiography of the Afghan ruler Abdur Rahman Khan, when he recalls that his grandfather, Dost Mohammad Khan, had to constantly deal with Persia sending political agents to control Herat.[153] Nonetheless, when Persia's efforts did not succeed, they looked to other ways to influence Afghanistan. Following the First Anglo-Afghan War, the Persians attempted to bribe Yar Mohammad of Herat to compete for influence with the lavish amount of money the British were providing him.[154] Then in the early 1850s, Persia sought to sign a quadripartite treaty between itself and the three major Afghan khanates of Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat as a defensive alliance against the political and military encroachments of the great powers in the region.[155] This revealing political manoeuvre illustrates the extent of how desperate Persia was to use its influence over and relationship with Afghanistan as a way to compete against the Russians and the British. Discussed in all the forthcoming chapters, these tactic have many contemporary parallels to the Iranian-Afghan relationship in the twentieth century, especially the example of Iran's creation of Iranian-led 'non-allied' regional collectives involving its neighbouring states to mitigate Western and Russian influence in the region.[156]

However, Persian entreaties at this time were particularly unappealing to the Afghans, who could not ignore the increasing aggressiveness of Persian designs on the Afghan people and its territories.[157] A British official serving in an advisory capacity to the government in Kabul, noted that the Afghans knew that the Persians wanted to conquer them and that they could easily do so.[158] The British took the

[152] Stewart, *Through Persia,* p. 220.
[153] Rahman, Abdur. Mir Munshi (Ed.) *The Life of Abdur Rahman, Emir of Afghanistan*. (London: 1900), p. 41-3. This is also corroborated by the accounts of Dost Mohammad Khan's British advisors. See, Burnes, *Cabool*, p. 275.
[154] Rawlinson, *Russia and the East,* p. 63.
[155] Ibid. p. 88.
[156] Avery, Hambly and Melville, *Cambridge History,* p. 330.
[157] Rawlinson, *Russia and the East*, p. 89.
[158] Burnes, *Cabool,* p. 375.

opportunity to formally warn the Persians to discontinue their threats of military advances on Afghanistan by making them sign an agreement to not interfere in Afghan affairs in 1853.[159] Sir Henry Rawlinson points out that this was a main reason for a thaw in Anglo-Afghan relations that led to the signing of the 1855 Treaty of Peshawar between Britain, British India, and Afghanistan.[160] The treaty successfully brought Afghanistan back into the British fold, restating their diplomatic alliance, with Britain reaffirming her pledge to protect Afghanistan from any additional Persian and Russian attempts to take Herat.[161] Persia's paranoia and jealousy of the British-Afghan relationship was only exacerbated by this new alliance.[162] The British were soon forced to fulfil the promises in their recent treaty with the Afghans, as Persia and Russia waged their most successful attempt to date to take Herat, occupying the city for several months in 1856. The Anglo-Persian War ensued, during which the British confronted the Persians directly, and knowing they would be unable to defeat the British by being well outnumbered, the Persians had no choice but to withdrawal their troops from Herat.[163]

The important outcome of this final Persian irredentist attempt on Herat was the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1857, another humiliating treaty with a great power in which Britain forced Persia to renounce all claims to Herat and Afghan territory, with the only exception being if Afghanistan violated Persia's borders.[164] In Article VI, it is stipulated that the Shah must abstain from interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, and that from thence onwards, the Persians agreed that all future disputes between Persia and Afghanistan would have to be raised with the British.[165] Britain was also sure to specify that should Afghanistan violate Persian

[159] Hurewitz, *Diplomacy,* pp. 141-2.
[160] Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East: A Series of Papers on the Political and Geographical Condition of Central Asia* (London: 1875), p. 89.
[161] FO 93/75/5A, 'Treaty. Peace and Commerce etc.' and FO 93/75/6B, 'Treaty. Peace and Commerce etc. Ratification,' 3/4/1857.
[162] Rawlinson, *England and Russia*, p. 104-5.
[163] Busse, *History of Persia,* pp. 331-334.
[164] FO 93/75/5A, 'Treaty. Peace and Commerce etc.' and FO 93/75/6B, 'Treaty. Peace and Commerce etc. Ratification.'
[165] Ibid.

territory, Persia could take up arms against them, but they must not remain in Afghanistan after accomplishing the conclusion of that conflict.[166]

The British decision to directly attack Persia to protect Afghanistan had now set a precedent for the British to continue to do so, as a buffer for India, in the decades to come.[167] Upon the ratification of this treaty, there remained Persians who hoped to maintain a presence in western Afghan territories, as they continued to feel that they historically constituted part of Iran.[168] In attempting to reassert itself against the British in the aftermath of the war, the Persians continued to threaten military advances against the Afghans, in direct violation of Article VI of the Treaty of Paris.[169] In response, the British signed an addendum to their 1855 treaty with the Afghans expressly stating that the British would provide subsidies for any future confrontation with the Persians and made provisions for a British military unit to go to Kandahar, with the permission of the Afghans, to protect it from any future Persian or Russian threat.[170] By 1863, the Anglo-Afghan relationship was in such good standing that Dost Mohammad Khan was able to retake complete control of Herat with the blessing of the British.[171]

Given these wars and contests for territory in the Persian-Afghan relationship, it is clear that the British and Russians had chosen their sides and controlled the framework by which Persia and Afghanistan could interact with one another. British control of the Perso-Afghan relationship and its favouring Afghanistan continued to affect both countries into the 20th century. Notably, the Mohammad Reza Shah recounts the British taking Herat from Persia twice in three pages of his version of Persia's history in his book *The Shah's Story*, published first in 1979. His retelling of this period in Iran's history is revealing of the persistence in the power of the Myth of the Great Civilisation and the Myth of Foreign Domination in informing his worldview. The Shah said,

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[166] Ibid.
[167] Rawlinson, *England and Russia*, p. 380.
[168] Avery, Hambly, and Melville, *Cambridge History*, p. 183.
[169] Curzon, *Persia,* pp. 229-30.
[170] Blood, Peter R. (ed.). 'The Second Anglo-Afghan War' in *Afghanistan: A Country Study for the Library of Congress* (Washington: 2001).
[171] Ibid.

> Although at the outset of Mohammad Shah's reign in 1838 we were still fighting for the province of Herat, WHICH BELONGS TO US, we were destined to abandon it finally and to recognize the kingdom of Afghanistan merely as the result of a British threat.[172]

The extent of Persia's powerlessness to regain control of the relationship over which it formerly had complete control had strong implications for Persia's late-nineteenth century strategy to influence Afghanistan politically rather than militarily. With the Persian court still expressing disfavour with the British, Persia began to cleverly use the political arbitration framework stipulated by the British in the Treaty of Paris to their advantage by embroiling the British in a slew of territorial disputes between the Persians and Afghans.[173] This mainly took form in the British arbitration of the division of resource-rich Sistan (Baluchistan) in the 1860s and 1870s, as both Afghanistan and Persia had historical claims to the land. The Persians used Britain's initial refusal to arbitrate the Sistan issue, referencing the Treaty of Paris, to enable them to 'protect' their boundaries from the Afghans by displaying a force of Persian troops and taking an aggressive stance in the province.[174] Thus politically, Persia was still using Afghanistan as regional leverage to stage shows of power against the great powers.

The late 1800s also marked a shift in British policy that had a direct impact on Iran and Afghanistan. Beginning in the 1860s, the British stance toward Iran and Afghanistan had less to do with Russia's political influence on these places than it did with Russia's encroaching physical presence on both Persia and Afghanistan's borders and what this meant for India.[175] By 1868, Russia had annexed Tashkent and brokered a deal with its leader that effectively usurped his independence. Russia was now directly on Afghanistan's northern border. This made Afghanistan a less reliable barrier for Russian access to India, making it more urgent for the British to solve the Sistan issue so that Sistan could not be used by the Russians or Persians as a base from which to attack India.[176] Considering that Sistan had refused to pay tribute to

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[172] Capital letters are part of the original text. Pahlavi, *Shah's Story,* pp. 14-17.
[173] Rawlinson, *Memoir*, pp. 208-9.
[174] Curzon, *Persia,* pp. 229-230.
[175] Avery, Hambly and Melville, *Cambridge History,* p. 397.
[176] Curzon, *Persia,* p. 235.

Persia since the death of Nadir Shah, the British verdict on authority over the Sistan region was disproportionately advantageous to Persia, seen as a small concession to encourage the Persians not to allow Russian access to the Sistan.[177] It also led to the formal delineation of a Persian-Afghan border by the British in 1872. Hedging its bets again, the British also successfully reached an agreement with Russia in 1873 in order to formalize Afghanistan's northern boundary and push Russia to acknowledge that Afghanistan was strictly outside of its sphere of influence.[178]

Afghanistan made the British pay for their convenient solution to the arbitration. By 1873, Sher Ali, the current leader of Afghanistan, complaining that the Sistan arbitration favoured Persia, while the British insisted that Sistan was originally Persian land.[179] Sher Ali spited the British for the Sistan arrangement, allowing a Russian diplomatic mission to come to Kabul.[180] When the British responded by insisting on sending a diplomatic mission of their own, a demand Sher Ali rejected, the British sent forces to invade Afghanistan in 1878. This triggered the Second Anglo-Afghan War, as the British broke their 1855 treaty promising not to send troops into Afghanistan. Yet again, a territorial contest between Persia and Afghanistan had catalysed a war between the British and Afghans over concerns about Russia. Because the Afghans could now no longer be trusted to deter the Russians, the British insisted on placing British officers in Herat, Kandahar, and Kabul as well as having British soldiers guarding the Afghan passageways into India. Soon after sending their diplomatic mission to Kabul, the mission was massacred by the Afghans, continuing the war.[181]

Thus by 1879, the British were contemplating a full change in their regional strategy based on recent events in Afghanistan. British foreign minister Lord Salisbury proposed a drastic policy shift of supporting Persia over Afghanistan in order to protect India because it did not foresee Afghanistan being a sustainable ally

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[177] Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire,* p. 197.
[178] Sykes, *Afghanistan*, pp. 87-88.
[179] Avery, Hambly and Melville, *Cambridge History,* p. 402.
[180] Curzon, *Persia,* p. 233.
[181] Kazemzadeh, F. "Anglo-Iranian Relations ii. Qajar Period". *Encylopaedia Iranica.* 5 August 2011. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anglo-iranian- relations-ii>.

in the near future.[182] Britain again started negotiations with Persia, dangling the prospect of allowing the Shah to take Herat so that the British could more easily establish diplomatic missions and a railroad to facilitate the trade route between Herat and Kandahar.[183] Suddenly in 1880, the Shah suspended the negotiations on Herat, and while the histories are unclear on their exact reasons, it is suggested that secret communication and pressure from the Russians was likely the cause.[184] The opportunity to extend the Anglo-Persian relationship ended with the failure of these negotiations, and Russo-Persian relationship intensified. However, not long thereafter, the British were in the ascendant in their war with Afghanistan. They eventually subdued the Afghans and using the subsequent peace treaty to force Afghanistan into submission. Like Persia had in similar treaties, Afghanistan lost much of its power in signing the Treaty of Gandamak, in which the British formally usurped control of *all* of Afghanistan's foreign affairs. To ensure Afghan compliance, the British proceeded to install Abdur Rahman Khan in 1880 to ensure a pro-British government.[185] This would set the tone for the Anglo-Afghan and Anglo-Persian relationships until the early twentieth century.

These developments had perhaps the largest impact on Persian-Afghan relations. Still wary of Persia, in his autobiography, Abdur Rahman recalls that a key point in the treaty that brought him to the throne was that the British promised to protect Afghanistan from Persia and Russia, and those states had 'pledged' to stay out of Afghan affairs.[186] It is particularly illustrative of this period that the only mention of Abdur Rahman's contact with Persia was one instance: when he refused to see the Shah in Tehran, the Shah sent a condescending note saying that he 'looked upon [Abdur Rahman] as a son' and that he should always 'look up on Persia as [his] home.'[187] Abdur Rahman Khan ruled from 1880 to 1901, a period in which he acquiesced to British demands to conduct Afghanistan's foreign policy while, understandably, he advanced internal policies that made it difficult for foreigners to

[182] Avery, Hambly and Melville, *Cambridge History,* p. 403.
[183] Curzon, *Persia,* p. 586.
[184] Avery, Hambly and Melville, *Cambridge History,* p. 404.
[185] Sykes, *Afghanistan*, pp. 119, 137.
[186] Rahman, *Life of Abdur Rahman,* pp. 193-94.
[187] Ibid, p. 130.

conduct any sort of business in Afghanistan.[188] Notably, Perso-Afghan trade was affected and dropped to a lower level than any of either countries' other trade relationships, with Persia and Afghanistan only exchanging a small and equal amount of low-value goods.[189] By 1884 Abdur Rahman had also ordered a sizeable garrison on Afghan troops to Herat in order to protect it from any further interference from Persia.[190]

Due to this and other factors, the Anglo-Persian relationship experienced some level of rapprochement over trade and commerce in the late nineteenth century. An official from the British Telegraph Office made the point that the only reason the King of England tolerated the Persians during this period was the fear of Russia, to make revenues from its telegraph lines there, and the concern of the fall of Herat and the consequences it would have on India.[191] While British interests did not inspire a significant relationship with Persia until the discovery of oil in 1908, the Anglo-Afghan and Persian-Afghan relationship was mostly inactive before this period.[192] However, having spent most of the century paranoid about the British influence with Afghanistan and attempting to assert itself against the British through Afghanistan, the Persians used this opportunity to get closer to the British in the late 1800s. One way in which Persia accomplished this was in the handing out of major concessions to the British.[193] This was to culminate when industrialization became more important for the British, with the Tobacco Regie of 1890 and eventually in the D'Arcy oil concession of 1901.[194]

In sum, Lord Salisbury made the apt observation toward the end of the 1800s that throughout that century:

> Central Asian politics have been a game…in which it has been necessary to sacrifice either Persia or Afghanistan in order to leave room for the other to move. But the two being under two co-ordinate authorities instead of under one, our policy has never

[188] Merchants and British officials remarked on their inability to lay telegraph lines and conduct trade through Afghanistan as the environment was 'unfavourable.' See Curzon, *Persia,* pp. 45, 210.
[189] Curzon, *Persia,* p. 214.
[190] Stewart, *Through Persia,* pp. 267, 270.
[191] Wills, Charles James. *Persia As it Is: Being Sketches of Modern Persian Life and Character*. (London: 1886). p. 34.
[192] Cottam*, Nationalism,* p. 159.
[193] Sykes, *Persia*, p. 370-1.
[194] Martin, *The Qajar Pact,* p. 15.

> represented the distinct choice of a single mind, but a compromise between two conflicting claims…[Afghanistan] learned to distrust us–and Persia has never ever been disposed to like us.[195]

The quandary represented in this statement reflects the framework in which Persian-Afghan relations were situated within the nineteenth century in that they were heavily restricted by the strategies of the British and Russians in their competition with one another. However, the situation began to change in the early twentieth century with an unexpected Anglo-Russian détente and the increasing independence of Afghanistan and, to a lesser extent, of Persia.

Persia, Afghanistan, and the Great Powers at the Turn of the Century

At the turn of the century, Persia and Afghanistan continued to lack direct relations due to great-power control over important aspects of both countries' internal and external affairs, which did not change until key events impacting Russia and Britain (namely World War I and the Russian Revolution) catalysed a turning point in their respective approaches toward Persia and Afghanistan.[196] The development most indicative of this period that had lasting consequences for both countries for years afterward was the signing of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention.

The 19th century had ended with Russia in control of most of Central Asia, which made Britain very anxious about the power balance in the region. As such, Britain had tried for years to entice Russia into signing a treaty on Persia and Afghanistan, the two most sensitive areas of their rivalry. They had not been successful because Russia saw no incentive in it and had the benefit of time on their side. However, the 1905 Russian Revolution and some military adventures in Asia that had gone wrong led the Russians to re-evaluate this stance and to favour improving relations with Britain. The 1907 Convention was designed to stipulate how Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet would function within an international system

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[195] Avery, Hambly and Melville, *Cambridge History,* pp. 423-4.

[196] R.K. Ramazani said "External and internal conditions had militated against the development of Iran's foreign policy during the turbulent years of [1905-1920] to such an extent that the very expression "foreign policy" can be regarded as a misnomer because Iran had little control over its own destiny." see Ramazani, R.K. *The Foreign Policy of Iran, A Developing Nation in World Affairs, 1500-1941*, pp. 105-108, 111-112, 171, and for Afghanistan during Habibullah's reign (1901-1919), see Barfield, pp. 175-178.

structured for over a century around the Anglo-Russian rivalry that would now become an Anglo-Russian entente. Persia was split into British and Russian areas of influence, and Afghanistan was determined to be in Britain's sphere of influence.[197]

The Anglo-Russian collusion the convention represented infuriated the Persians and Afghans because it reignited now mythologized sentiments around foreign domination. As was customary in colonial conventions, Persia and Afghanistan had not been informed that either power had been negotiating an agreement directly consequential to their fates.[198] This status quo continued during World War I, when Britain and Russia were allied against Germany and the Ottoman Empire, to prevent from Central-power incursions into Persian territory for oil. As such, Persia's constitutionalist politicians were unable to assert the neutral wartime policy they had hoped to.[199] Meanwhile, Afghanistan struggled with continued British control of her foreign affairs. Afghanistan did not have any direct political relations of note with Russia, as Russia had acknowledged Afghanistan was firmly under British influence as the buffer state to protect India.[200] Though bourgeoning nationalists in Afghanistan wanted to use World War I as an opportunity to resist the British and engage Central powers like Germany in the lead-up to World War I, great-power pressures forced Afghan Amir Habibullah into a domestically unpopular policy of "neutrality" until the conclusion of the war.[201]

Persia and Afghanistan finally began to assert themselves in their foreign affairs due mainly to shifts in the foreign-policy calculous of Russia and Britain

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[197] Articles I and II of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention regarding the status of Afghanistan, Persia, and Nepal divided Persia into British influence in the south and Russian in the north. The treaty also stipulated Britain's influence over Afghanistan and that neither country would interfere in Tibet's internal affairs. The British and Russians considered the Near East the only area where tensions between them remained. Therefore, the Anglo-Russian Convention had the effect of clearing the slate for the old rivals. See, CAB 37/89/80; Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran, 1500-1941*, p. 92.
[198] *Encylopaedia Iranica*, 'Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907,' December 15, 1985. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anglo-russian-convention-of-1907-an-agreement-relating-to-persia-afghanistan-and-tibet> and Gov.uk, 'History of Government: Anglo-Russian Entente 1907,' August 31, 2017. <https://history.blog.gov.uk/2017/08/31/anglo-russian-entente-1907/>.
[199] FRUS, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917, Supplement 2, The World War, Volume I, p. 494 and Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran, 1500-1941,* p. 116.
[200] Gov.uk, 'History of Government: Anglo-Russian Entente 1907,' August 31, 2017. <https://history.blog.gov.uk/2017/08/31/anglo-russian-entente-1907/>.
[201] Habibullah had actually entered a secret agreement to join the German war effort if the Germans sent weapons and money to Afghanistan, but when they did not, he had no choice but to pursue neutrality. Barfield, pp. 177-8.

following the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the conclusion of World War I, as well as, to a lesser extent, the efforts of a few strong, nationalist leaders in Persia and Afghanistan seeking to gain independence from the great powers. The first sea change Persian and Afghan nationalists were able to seize on was the Russian Revolution in 1917, which resulted in the abolishment of the Russian monarchy and establishment of a Bolshevik-led republic. The Bolsheviks initially articulated a drastically different foreign policy approach than that of Imperial Russia to the region's states. They insisted on respecting smaller states' independence and wanted to cancel Tsarist agreements that had infringed upon that independence.[202] This was first evidenced in the treaty the Bolsheviks signed with the Central powers to end World War I, a key provision of which was that all the treaty parties would respect Persia and Afghanistan's sovereignty as "independent nations." This approach, immensely appealing to the region's nations, constituted a significant threat to Britain's way of managing relations with these nations and incited the region's nationalist leaders to seek more freedom from control by the only imperial power left. As a result, the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian reset of its foreign affairs ended the Anglo-Russo détente and caused both nations to revert to their old regional rivalry.[203]

Britain attempted to take the opportunity of Russia's "kinder" approach to the region to establish a more dominant position in Persia, moving British forces from their stronghold in the south into the traditionally Russian-dominated areas of northern Persia in 1918. Britain began influencing successive Persian prime ministers to memorialize the capitulations granted to her at the turn of the century in the highly controversial 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement. This agreement and Britain's military actions in Persia angered the Russians, who felt Persia had sold out her sovereignty to Britain. As a result, the Russians waged low-key military operations into Persia, hoping to pressure Persia for political concessions.[204] This interference had a positive

[202] Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran, 1500-1941*, p. 141-2.
[203] The treaty referenced is the Peace Treaty of Brest Litovsk, signed March 3, 1918 by Russia, one of many peace treaties ending World War I. For the full text of the treaty, see FRUS, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia, Volume I, pp. 442-5; Toynbee, *Arnold J, Survey of International Affairs 1928*, (London: 1929), pp. 365-6.
[204] Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran, 1500-1941*, p. 126, 148-152.

impact for Persia: by May 1920 Persia was able to denounce the Anglo-Persian Agreement because a Russian military expedition had pressured Britain to remove its troops from northern Persia.[205] Then Persian constitutionalist politicians were able to work with the Bolsheviks to cement the latter's promises to Persia in mid-1918 to abrogate the 1907 Anglo-Russian convention and other Tsarist conventions harmful to Persian sovereignty, and to withdrawal Russian troops from northern Iran.[206]

Despite renewed Russian-British competition in Persia from 1918-1920, and both countries' maintenance of influence in Persia, this period also saw Britain give Afghanistan its independence, which in turn, almost immediately led to an expansion of Russian influence there. The change in Russia's policy toward Afghanistan after its 1917 revolution gave Afghanistan a freedom of action that she quickly used in 1919 to attack British India, which precipitated the Third Anglo-Afghan War.[207] Though Britain quickly defeated Afghan forces by air bombing Afghan territory, the Afghans were still inciting tribal rebellions on the Indian border, and the British were weary from the Great War. When the parties decided mutually to end hostilities, they signed the Treaty of Rawalpindi in August 1919, the main outcome of which was giving Afghanistan independence from Britain and control of her foreign affairs.[208] Shortly thereafter, King Amanullah Khan embarked upon a series of diplomatic charm offensives to build bilateral relations with countries other than Britain. This included establishing relations with Russia, the first country to recognize Afghanistan's independence in 1919, and sending Afghan envoys to Persia (March 1920), Turkey (May 1920), the United States (July 1921), and elsewhere.[209]

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[205] Toynbee, *International Affairs 1928*, p. 365.
[206] Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran, 1500-1941*, p. 158
[207] Toynbee, *International Affairs 1928*, p. 365.
[208] Barfield, *Afghanistan,* p. 181; Tanner, Stephen. *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the War against the Taliban.* (Philadelphia: 2009), p. 129.
[209] Emadi, Hafizullah. *Dynamics of Political Development in Afghanistan: The British, Russian, and American Invasions.* (New York: 2010), p. 19; FO 248/1275, 'Afghan Affairs-Anglo-Persian Oil Company, Vol. 1,' Folio 30, 24/2/1920; Folio 31, 28/2/1920; Folio 37, 1/5/1920; Folio 39, 5/4/1920; FRUS, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921, Volume I, pp. 258-9.

Persia and Afghanistan Begin a Bilateral Relationship

While Afghanistan was navigating its recently won control of its foreign affairs from the British, Persia was still under the thumb of Britain when Afghanistan approached Persia to begin diplomatic relations in January 1920. Britain's influence over Persian decision-making played a key role in the establishment of Persian-Afghan diplomatic relations and influenced the course of their early bilateral relationship. According to Anglo-Persian Oil Company records, King Amanullah initiated formal diplomatic relations with Persia by sending two Afghan diplomats to Herat to await permission from Persia to proceed into her territory in January 1920. The first was an Afghan official named Abdul Baki Beg, chosen to lead a possible Afghan consulate in Mashhad. The second was an official named Abdul Aziz Khan, whom Amanullah intended to be the Afghan ambassador to Tehran.[210]

Immediately British officials protested Abdul Baki's presence, and commented in their records that "the Persian Government ha[d] been warned" of the British protest and "ha[d] given a satisfactory assurance" regarding not allowing Baki to enter Persia.[211] British officials had received reports about the Afghan envoys, including that they had travelled with "spies," that made the British suspicious of them and of Amanullah's intentions in sending them.[212] Indicative of the time, British officials lamented that by sending these envoys, Amanullah was "probably seek[ing] to sow suspicion between Persians and ourselves and may also represent that the salvation of Persia lies in alliance with Bolsheviks as liberators of the East from Western Imperialism and capitalism."[213]

The issue got the attention of London, and the Foreign Office ordered British officials in Persia to tell the Persian government that since there was no treaty signed between Persia and Afghanistan, there was no justification for a consulate general in Mashhad, and to not allow Abdul Baki into Persia. They proposed instead that Abdul

[210] Mashhad is close to the Afghan border and is an Iranian city where many Afghans live (some citizens and some Iranian citizens with Afghan heritage). It is also a major trade center between the two countries, as an old trade route connecting Tehran with Herat. FO 248/1275, Folio 2, 2/1/1920; Folio 5, 10/1/1920; Folio 11, 24/1/1920.
[211] FO 248/1275, Folio 2, 2/1/1920.
[212] FO 248/1275, Folio 24, 7/2/1920.
[213] FO 248/1275, Folio 44, 14/4/1920.

Aziz be allowed to travel to Tehran to negotiate a treaty between the two governments. The Foreign Office admitted to suggesting the latter only because they were more inclined, in what they felt were existing critical circumstances, for the envoy to come so that they could determine "what [was] in mind of Afghan government." The Persian government informed British officials they would heed their suggestion, and invited Abdul Aziz to proceed to Tehran.[214]

Once Abdul Aziz arrived in Tehran in April or May 1920, then-British Minister to Tehran Sir Percy Cox used the close rapport he had developed with Persian Prime Minister Vusuq al Dowleh, to implore Dowleh to tell him confidentially what the Afghan envoy was saying in his meetings with Persian officials. He asked for a comprehensive report, including a copy of the letter Sir Percy learned that the envoy was carrying from Amanullah to the Persian government. Sir Percy also said he had heard that the Afghans wanted to establish relations with Persia but that "allusions to great Britain were made, which were offensive in tone" and that the envoy was "openly canvassing for Bolshevism." Sir Percy made it clear that he was expecting Dowleh to report back on these matters.[215] Dowleh complied shortly thereafter and provided Sir Percy with a full reporting of the new Afghan envoy's conversations with Persian officials. Dowleh said the envoy was sent with the purpose of establishing relations with Persia. He also provided a copy of the confidential letter the envoy had carried from King Amanullah to Sultan Ahmad Shah.[216] The letter, dated November 8, 1919, clearly encourages the establishment of friendly relations with Persia and lays out Amanullah's reasons for seeking them. British officials later translated and reproduced it for the Foreign Office:

> My well respected friend and brother, H.M. Sultan Ahmad Shah, sovereign of the independent kingdom of Persia. After presentation of friendly greeting and the expression of respect, let it be known to H.M's mind that, despite the moral and material unity which existed between the two states, the governments of Persia and Afghanistan have, for a great many years, remained totally unfamiliar with each other. They have not had free communication between themselves by the means of friendly correspondence, or political and commercial

[214] FO 248/1275, Folio 29, 24/2/1920, Folio 30, 24/2/1920; Folio 31, 28/2/1920.
[215] FO 248/1275, Folio 50, n.d.; Folio 52, 28/5/1920.
[216] Ibid.

> relations. The reason of this, as must be clear to the Persian parliament, has been nothing but the misrepresentations of the world-conquerors, i.e. the despotic states whose minds are occupied with avaricious ideas of the conquest of the world, on this chessboard of misery and misfortune. It cannot be denied moreover, that the said avaricious world-conquerors have never regarded pan-Islamism as a channel by which the Islamic world could progress. They have not properly understood the meaning of pan-Islamism and have thought it to be directed against other religions, whilst the enlightened Muslims want the pan-Islamism for their own progress and civilization and not for the purpose of overthrowing or using it against other nations. Predestination does not allow everything to be in accordance with the wishes of the helpless human being. The terrible effect of the war in Europe has upset the world and consequently this friendly state, Afghanistan, has taken steps to declare its full independence and this has been now obtained. It is on this account that Afghanistan, with full liberty, wishes to establish and consolidate relations with its friendly and brotherly state of Persia by sending a temporary and if accepted, a permanent envoy. . . .It is hoped that the [Imperial Persian Government] will receive the envoy of friendly Afghanistan and will hasten to send a high representative to Kabul so that, by the will of the almighty, relations between the two imperial governments may be consolidated and improved. Sardar Abdul Aziz Khan should be regarded as a trustworthy envoy and in matters connected with the mutual interests of the two countries he may be communicated with. In conclusion, we pray for the Almighty's help and the moral assistance of the "Sacred Family" (of Mohamed) in regard to the Islamic states and the consolidation of their unity.[217]

British officials did not react positively to Amanullah's propositions. The suggested British response for the Persian government to send Amanullah—one that was provided to Persian officials—appeared to send just as strong a message to Persia as it did to Afghanistan. British officials wrote, as the Shah:

> It would in the opinion of my government be inconvenient and mistaken policy to confuse question of political relations between our two states by reference to religious considerations upon which owing to their past history it is unlikely that views of Persia and Afghanistan would coincide. Apart from this however, I welcome the desire of neighboring state of Afghanistan to establish closer relations between my government and for that purpose I am willing to accept Sardar Abul Aziz as Afghan envoy. This acceptance should not be taken as indication of any desire on the part of Persia to forfeit advantage accruing to her under Treaty of 1857 between Persia and Great Britain under which the latter is bound to undertake mediation between Persia and Afghanistan in the event of a conflict of views between them. As to suggestion that Persian representative should be sent to Kabul I

[217] FO 248/1275, Folio 53, 28/5/1920.

> should prefer to wait for some time until present confused situation in Central Asia is clearer and until the trend of policy of Afghanistan towards her powerful neighbors Great Britain and Russia has become more plain.[218]

Considering the sensitivity of the subject to Britain, in late July Dowleh sought British counsel on whether the Persian government should reciprocate the Afghan diplomatic gesture by sending a Persian envoy to Kabul as King Amanullah requested. A British Embassy official said he told Dowleh that the Persian government "had at present more important things to think about" and that "[Dowleh] agreed and said that, anyhow, he would consult H.M. Minister [in Tehran] before taking any decisive step in the matter." The official continued, "I believe hardly any Persians contemplate an alliance with Afghanistan. They don't take the Afghans seriously."[219]

While Amanullah's letter had not expressed the friendliest of sentiments toward the great powers, nothing overtly indicated Afghan sympathies for Bolshevism or intentions for Persia regarding closer relations the Bolsheviks, as Britain feared. However, British paranoia in this regard appeared to turn in September 1920. The British Ambassador in Tehran wrote to the Foreign Office that he had shared with the Persian Prime Minister that they had incriminating reports that the Abdul Aziz and his brother were "intriguing with local Bolsheviks with a view of concluding an alliance between Persia and the Russians through the intermediary of Afghanistan."[220] The Prime Minister told this official that he had received similar reports. The official noted that as a matter of protocol, the Shah would likely need to respond in kind to Amanullah's gesture and send a special mission to Kabul, though it was unclear whether the Persians would ask for the recall of Abdul Aziz due to his alleged transgressions. The Prime Minister also said that one repeated request Aziz had made was the establishment of an Afghan consular office at Mashhad to protect the interests of the numerous Afghans living there, and he asked whether the British

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[218] FO 248/1275, Folio 55, 11/6/1920; Folio 59, 12/6/1920.
[219] FO 248/1275, Folio 63, 21/7/1920.
[220] The timing is not surprising, as Bolshevik military incursions into northern Persia beginning in May 1920 had pushed British forces out of the area. See Toynbee, p. 395. FO 248/1275, Folio 70, 9/10/1920; Folio 71, 9/13/1920.

government would have any objection to the presence of a low-level consular official there.[221] The reaction of British officials in India was strong: "As we have already represented…there would be grave danger from Afghan Consular Officer at Meshed [sic]. Fact that Afghan representative at Tehran has been intriguing with the local Bolsheviks would perhaps give Persian Government valid excuse for refusing to receive at present juncture Afghan Consular Officer at Meshed which is more dangerous focus for Bolshevik activity than Tehran."[222]

As may be expected, Britain took control over how the Persian government responded to Amanullah's appeal for relations. British officials reported that after further discussions with the British Ambassador in Tehran, the Persian government had decided that they would recognize an Afghan consul at Mashhad for the time being until a Persian envoy could establish themselves in Afghanistan. Apparently the British Ambassador had pushed this course of action when realizing that its benefit would be to give the Persian envoy enough time in Afghanistan to determine "the condition of the country and the nature and extent of her relations with the Bolsheviks."[223] Additionally, when the Persian government was unable to successfully send their special envoy to Kabul by way of Khorasan (through Persian territory) in November 1920 due to poor transportation routes, the Persian government had to request Britain's permission for their envoy to travel to Kabul through Indian territory. In exchange for the British making the necessary arrangements, the Persians assured British officials that their Kabul mission was purely complimentary in nature, and that the special envoy would of course report what he saw back to the British.[224]

Therefore, 1920 was the first time diplomatic relations could be established between Persia and Afghanistan because for more than a century the great powers had made this hitherto impossible. It is ironic that while the Afghans sought to begin the new bilateral relationship as a way to become more independent from the great

[221] Ibid.
[222] FCO 248/1275, Folio 71, 9/13/1920.
[223] Ibid.
[224] FO 248/1275, Folio 78, 30/11/1920.

powers, its establishment was actually only made possible by the political assent and logistical support of the British.

Reza Shah and the Formalization of Iranian-Afghan Relations (1921-41)

As Afghanistan was already an independent state, what contributed most to Iran's[225] and Afghanistan's ability develop formal bilateral relations was the Coup of 1921, the subsequent change in leadership in Iran, and the priority of Iran's leaders to assert independence by formalizing bilateral relations with other states without great-power interference. On February 21, 1921, Reza Khan and Seyyed Zia Tabatabai took power in Iran and made their primary policy achieving a more independent status and foreign policy for their country. In a few short years, Reza Khan consolidated power and crowned himself Shah of Iran in April 1925, a position he held until September 1941.[226] This period not only saw Iran formalize its bilateral diplomatic relationship with Afghanistan—which by all accounts was in its foundational stage and generally good— but it offers the first hints of what perpetually motivates Iranian intentions and shapes its policy towards Afghanistan. As discussed earlier, these continued to include: a primary focus on Iranian concern about great power influence and/or penetration, Iran's desire to take a dominant leadership position in regional initiatives and perspective that Afghan participation is crucial, and the consequential elevation of Iran to a low level of competition with the great powers for involvement in the region's affairs. These issues will be discussed as pertinent to the key moments of the Iranian-Afghan relationship from 1921-1941, namely the signing of three treaties: the bilateral 1921 Treaty of Friendship, the bilateral 1927 Treaty of Friendship and Security, and the Iran-led, multilateral 1937 Saadabad Pact.

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[225] Several scholars cite 1921 as the beginning of the modern Iranian state due to Reza Khan (later Reza Shah) immense efforts to modernize the country after taking power in the Coup of 1921. When he became shah, Reza Shah declared that Persia should be called Iran in 1935, in part to distinguish the "new" Iran he had created from the country under the older Persian dynasties. Due to the fact that 1935 hits in the middle of this section, Persia will be referred to as Iran from this point forward. See Ansari, *Modern Iran,* p. 2-3, 51; Keddie, *Modern Iran,* p. 87-89; Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran, 1500-1941,* p. 171-2; Cronin, Stephanie (ed.). *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society Under Riza Shah, 1921-1941.* (London: 2003), pp. 4-5.

[226] Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran, 1500-1941,* p. 171-180, 186, 197.

Reza Khan and Seyyid Zia's policy of making Persia more independent from the great powers initially took form in Iran's renegotiation of its formal treaties and provisional agreements with the ex-capitulatory powers in order to replace the old capitulations regime. Their policy was also advanced by Tehran seeking to formalize its bilateral relations, separate from great-power interference, and with nations other than Britain and Russia.227 One of the first nations Iran chose was Afghanistan.

Iran and Afghanistan signed their Treaty of Friendship on June 22, 1921, which served to memorialize the basic principles of Iranian-Afghan bilateral relations, stemming from "unity of religion and race, as well as from ties of neighbourliness." The treaty is reciprocal and reveals some elements underlying the foreign policy priorities of both states. The key articles of the agreement were:

- citizens of one country in the territory of another are subject to the laws of the country they are in, and if those citizens commit a crime in the other's country, representatives from that citizen's country cannot intervene in the other country's legal actions against the citizen
- all diplomatic officials from ambassadors to consular agents would be approved by the country in which they would serve their duties, and that the parties should immediately draw up trade and commercial treaties
- nationals of one country in the territory of another should not have to complete any military or other service required for the citizens of that country
- extradition rights are guaranteed for citizens that commit grave offenses against the other country, but this does not extend to persons guilty of "political offenses"
- relations between Persia and Afghanistan should not be affected in the event one of parties becomes involved in a war with a third Power, and if this does happen, the other party should be neutral and not favour the third power in any respect
- if the parties have a dispute that cannot be solved by diplomatic negotiations, they will submit the dispute to arbitration and "undertake loyally to carry out the decision of the arbitrators" (does not specify the type of arbitrator)[228]

While diplomatic historian J.C. Hurewitz asserts that this treaty "exemplified Islamic solidarity in face of imperialism," this sentiment is more contextual than textual,

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[227] Toynbee, *International Affairs 1928*, p. 365; Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran, 1500-1941,* p. 187-191.

[228] The full text of the treaty is translated and reproduced in Hurewitz, J.C. *Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record, 2nd Ed. Volume 2, British-French Supremacy, 1914-1945*, pp. 260-262.

except for its article on neutrality, which was certainly a reaction to the Anglo-Russian competition that reignited after the end of World War I.[229]

What is more important about this treaty is how it came to be signed. According to British historian Arnold J. Toynbee, who wrote prolifically on 20th century diplomatic history, in the period leading up to the Iranian-Afghan Treaty of Friendship, the Russians began an initiative creating a system of treaties linking Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan with Soviet Russia and with one another. The Bolshevik government had suggested the rapprochement of these three Middle Eastern states to each other as part of the states' rapprochement with the Bolsheviks. The first of this system was the Russo-Persian Treaty of February 26, 1921 (signed in Moscow), followed by the Russo-Afghan Treaty of February 28, 1921 (also signed in Moscow), the Turco-Afghan Treaty signed March 1, 1921 in Moscow, the Russo-Turkish Treaty signed March 16, 1921 in Moscow, and lastly the Perso-Afghan Treaty of June 22, 1921, signed in Tehran. Toynbee points to the fact all but one of these treaties were signed in Moscow meant they were done so "under Soviet auspices," the one outlier being the Iranian-Afghan Treaty, signed in Tehran.[230] Thus, the fact that the Iranian-Afghan agreement was signed in Tehran suggests a more independent Iranian initiative in formalizing its relationship with Afghanistan.

Iran's independent streak continued, and by 1927, Iran had further rejected great-power entitlements and expanded its bilateral ties with regional nations. In May 1927, Reza Shah unilaterally announced the abolishment of all Iranian treaties with foreign powers that provided for consular jurisdiction and extra-territorial privileges for foreign nationals in Iran, surprising all the powers involved in the country. Interestingly, the Iranians cited Afghanistan, where similar capitulations had been revoked, as one of the examples behind their inspiration.[231] It was also around this time that Tehran signed another series of treaties with Turkey, Afghanistan, and

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[229] However, the articles of the treaty allowing an exception to extradition for those committing political crimes, and the proposed submission of disputes for external arbitration, would actually do very little, if anything, to protect against the possibilities for foreign intervention in Iranian-Afghan affairs. See Ibid and Toynbee*, International Affairs 1928*, p. 366.
[230] Toynbee*, International Affairs 1928*, pp. 361-4.
[231] FRUS, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1927, Volume III, Document 593, 17/5/1927.

Egypt between 1925 and 1928. Toynbee recalls that these treaties were among a series of "component" treaties to the 1921 treaties, but that Russian diplomacy had played far less a role in the signing of the latter treaties. Only one of the regional treaties during this period was signed in Moscow, the Russo-Persian Treaty of October 1, 1927, with all the rest signed in Middle Eastern countries (and one in Paris).[232] This indicated a trend in which Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey advanced their direct relationships beyond the states' respective relations with the Soviet Union.[233]

It was within this context that Iran and Afghanistan further expanded their relations with the signing of the Iranian-Afghan Treaty of Friendship and Security on November 28, 1927 in Tehran. This treaty offers a good deal of insight into the early bilateral Iranian-Afghan relationship dynamic. Much different from the Treaty of Friendship in 1921, the 1927 treaty is very clearly a nonaggression and non-interference treaty that sought to address the issues that had arisen between the states. The treaty was negotiated at a time when border disputes had escalated between Iran and Afghanistan over the perennial issue of the distribution of the Helmand River waters.[234] These tensions were described as "even more strained than those on the frontier with Turkey" where there had been some pretty significant Kurdish tribal agitation problems.[235] The key articles of the treaty were:

- The parties commit to refraining from any attack or aggression against the other party and from encroachment by armed force upon each other's territories. In the event one party is the object of aggression from one or more third powers, the other party must be neutral throughout the duration of the hostilities, and so must the party being aggressed upon.

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[232] Toynbee*, International Affairs 1928*, pp. 363-4.
[233] Ibid.
[234] The Helmand River runs through Afghanistan into Iran. Though roughly two thirds of the river is located within Afghan territory, both countries rely on the scarce water resources the river provides to irrigate their agricultural communities in the rural areas surrounding the river. Iran has since the late 1800s agitated for greater Helmand River water provision from the Afghans. It has often created an impasse in relations between the two countries, which usually cannot settle on mutually agreeable terms, with the need for third-party arbitration. For a history of the dispute, see FRUS, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume V, Document 824, 'Editorial Note,' and the discussion of the Helmand waters issue in Chapters Three and Four.
[235] Additionally, these types of nonaggression treaties, and pacifism more generally, were in vogue globally in the interwar years, as they were modeled after the Treaty of Paris (1918) that ended World War I. See Toynbee*, International Affairs 1928*, p 4. Hurewitz, *Middle East,* pp. 391-2.

- Each party agrees not to participate in hostile action of any kind directed against the other party by one or more third powers, or to take part in name or in fact in political or military alliances or agreements directed against the independence, security, or authority of the other party or become involved in activities that result in the political or military disadvantage to the other. Each of the two parties will also refrain from participation in blockades or economic boycotts directed at the other party.
- In the event one or more third powers, at war with one of the two parties, violate the neutrality of the other party by moving troops, arms, or war materiel through latter's territory, seeking recruits or supplies in the latter's territory, trying to transit troops through the latter's territory, or inciting for their own benefit the latter's population to rebel, the latter party is obligated to prevent such actions by armed force and safeguard its neutrality.
- The parties agree to settle the differences that arise between them that may not have thus far been not possible through diplomatic channels.[236]

This is the first formal diplomatic agreement between Iran and Afghanistan that defines the two fundamental issues that would influence Iran's and Afghanistan's policies toward one another in the decades to come. Both countries, informed by a long history of great-power interference in the region, were concerned about the use of the other country by a third power in acts of political, military, or economic aggression against them, and both countries were suspicious of the other's intentions and had fears about the other country's interference in their affairs.

The treaty appeared to improve bilateral relations considerably. While King Amanullah conducted a widely publicized tour of Europe in 1928 to expand Afghanistan's diplomatic relations and observe Western-style development reforms, he made sure to visit his regional partners. On his return to Afghanistan, Reza Shah invited him to visit Tehran on June 5, 1928, Amanullah's first official state visit to Iran. The trip resulted in the expansion of the 1927 treaty with the signing of three supplementary protocols that laid the groundwork for mutual economic assistance, postal and telegraphic relations, and extradition.[237] However, Amanullah's efforts to

[236] Hurewitz, *Middle East,* pp. 391-2.
[237] It was interesting at this time that Afghanistan, compared to Iran, was very much in the lead in terms of its independence, its diplomatic efforts, and its views on modernization. King Amanullah's trip was famous for the fact that Queen Soraya of Afghanistan was unveiled for the duration, including during her time in Iran. In justaposition, Reza Shah's consort, would not even face King Amanullah. See Cronin, Stephanie. *The Making of Modern Iran,* p. 196. Toynbee, *International Affairs 1928*, pp. 364-5; FRUS, 1928, Volume III, Document 633, 5/6/1928; Emadi, Hafizullah. *Repression, Resistance, and Women in Afghanistan*, (London: 2003), p. 63.

expand Afghanistan's external relations had some unforeseen consequences that ended Amanullah's grand experiment to bring his country into the community of nations: while he was in Europe, a civil war had been started by a Tajik warlord, who by January 1929 took Kabul and forced Amanullah to abdicate his throne. This warlord's reign lasted nine months before the Afghan crown was returned to the hands of another Pashtun member of the royal family, Mohammad Nadir Khan.[238]

Leading into the 1930s, Nadir Khan undid most of Amanullah's modernizing reforms, but still faced a number of tribal uprisings in his short four-year reign, which ended in his assassination in 1933. This left his son Mohammad Zahir Khan to take the Afghan throne at the young age of 19. By many accounts, Zahir Shah did very little ruling for the first three decades of his reign, and Afghanistan was governed by his male relatives, Prime Ministers Mohammed Hashem Khan (1933-1946), Shah Mahmoud Khan (1946-1953), and Mohammed Daoud Khan (1953-1963).[239] As such, with much turbulence domestically in Afghanistan, it was many years before another major event in the Iranian-Afghan relationship.

Reza Shah's response to changes in the international political atmosphere in the 1930s brought about the next important development in Iran's foreign policy toward Afghanistan, the signing of the Saadabad Pact in 1937. This pact is the first example Iran's strategic use of its relationship with Afghanistan for obtaining Iran's goal of its historical position of regional leadership. Reza Shah had done much during this period to establish Iran as a modern nation-state by this time, not only had he embarking on a successful, fast-paced industrialization of the country but renegotiating or cancelling the last major great-power concessions.[240] However, as Iran was in the ascendant, Western nations were abandoning the pacifism of the earlier interwar years and were beginning a period of rearmament. This began with Nazi Germany's withdrawal from the international Disarmament Conference in October 1933 and Britain, France, and other European countries consequent decision

[238] Tanner, *Afghanistan,* p. 222.
[239] Barfield, *Afghanistan,* p. 197, 199 and Saikal, Amin. 'Islamism, the Iranian Revolution, and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,' in Leffler, M and Westad, O. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, (Cambridge: 2010), pp. 121-122.
[240] Keddie, *Modern Iran,* p. 95-95; Ansari, *Modern Iran,* pp. 70, 74-5, 78-79.

to rebuild their military arsenals, triggering an arms race that helped catalyse World War II.[241]

In response to this, Iran and Afghanistan sought security by joining multilateral peace initiatives. Still concerned about aggression from their northern neighbour, both countries became signatories to a Soviet-led multilateral nonaggression convention in 1933 along with the Soviet Union, Romania, Estonia, Poland, and Turkey. This convention was a follow-on agreement to the Treaty for Renunciation of War of August 1928, of which all the parties were signatories. The latter treaty was one of several interwar pacifist pacts that condemned recourse to war as a solution of international disputes or as an instrument of a nation's foreign policy.[242]

There is little doubt that these earlier international nonaggression agreements had inspired the Shah to create his own multilateral nonaggression agreement, the Saadabad Pact, as the pact's preamble actually references the Treaty for Renunciation of War. The Saadabad Pact was signed by Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Afghanistan on July 8, 1937. The preamble states that the signatories were "desirous of contributing by every means in their power to the maintenance of friendly and harmonious relations between them" with the "common purpose of ensuring peace and security in the Near East by means of additional guarantees within the framework of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and of thus contributing to general peace." It concludes by saying the parties are "deeply conscious of their obligations under the Treaty 3 for Renunciation of War, signed at Paris on August 27th, 1928, and of the

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[241] Toynbee, Arnold J. *Survey of International Affairs 1936*, (London: 1937), pp. 117-122.

[242] The convention served to further define "aggression" as outlined in the Treaty for the Renunciation of War (also known as the Kellogg-Briand Pact). The definition includes, among others, the following acts as constituting aggression: "Provision of support to armed bands formed in its territory which have invaded the territory of another State, or refusal, notwithstanding the request of the invaded State, to take, in its own territory, all the measures in its power to deprive those bands of all assistance or protection." See League of Nations Treaty Series, Volume 147, No. 3391, 'Convention for the Definition of Aggression. Signed at London, July 3rd, 1933,' p. 69 and Department of State, Office of the Historian, 'Milestones: 1921-1936, The Kellogg-Briand Pact, 1928,' <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/kellogg>.

other treaties to which they are parties, all of which are in harmony with the Covenant of the League of Nations and the Treaty for Renunciation of War."[243]

The Saadabad Pact committed the parties to:

- completely abstaining from any interference in each other's internal affairs
- respecting the inviolability of their common frontiers
- consulting together in all international disputes affecting their common interests
- agreeing not to resort, whether singly or jointly with one or more third powers, to any act of aggression directed against any other party of the pact
- bringing an impending or actual acts of aggression before the Council of the League of Nations or take any other steps they may deem necessary
- the ability to denounce the pact, without notice, if aggression occurs towards them
- preventing, within their respective borders, the formation or activities of armed bands, associations, or organisations to subvert the established institutions, or disturb the order or security, whether situated on the frontier or elsewhere, of the territory of another party, or to change the constitutional system of such other party
- recognising, as all parties had also signed the Treaty for Renunciation of War of 1928, that the settlement or solution of all disputes or conflicts, whatever their nature or origin, that arise among them will only achieved by pacific means[244]

In addition to ensuring that Iran was safe from any type of aggression against Iran, or interference in Iran's affairs, by her neighbours, the pact served a distinctly political purpose. Reza Shah clearly intended in creating the Saadabad Pact to restore Iran's position as a regional, if not global, leader separate from the great powers. That is evidenced by two overt Iranian actions. First, it is no coincidence that in the treaty's official title, Iran is the only country to attach the term "Empire" to its name, and in the list the leaders in its preamble, the term "Imperial" is attached to Reza

[243] League of Nations Treaty Series, Volume 190, No. 4402, 'Treaty of Non-Aggression between the Kingdom of Afghanistan, the Kingdom of Iraq, the Empire of Iran and the Republic of Turkey, Signed at Teheran, July 8th, 1937,' p. 23.
[244] League of Nations Treaty Series, Volume 190, No. 4402, 'Treaty of Non-Aggression between the Kingdom of Afghanistan, the Kingdom of Iraq, the Empire of Iran and the Republic of Turkey, Signed at Teheran, July 8th, 1937,' p. 23.

Shah's title.[245] Second, an Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement released shortly after the pact, signals the same type of:

> Being convinced that in view of the present political situation of the world it would appear [a war will localize] if it should break out in any part of the globe, the Government of His Imperial Majesty has aligned itself with the most ardent partisans of universal peace. It has always maintained absolute identity between this principle and its policy in general. Moreover, it has never failed to have recourse to pacific means to settle its differences with other states, and by following this line of conduct it has in a friendly way resolved its frontier disputes with Afghanistan, Turkey and Iraq. *The signing of the Saadabad Pact, for which the initiative came from the Imperial Government, is one of the most striking proofs of its unshakable desire to keep the peace, and it has the firm hope not only of safeguarding peace in Western Asia but also of becoming a[n]…important factor in the maintenance of peace in general.*[246]

Thus, as the architect of the Saadabad Pact, Reza Shah brought to fruition the first successful example of a multilateral pact between regional states with no great powers as signatories, elevating Iran's status as a regional power broker. Afghanistan was key to the initiative because by this time it was the weakest of the treaty parties bordering the Soviet Union, and therefore the most vulnerable to great-power interference that could affect the other parties. It was indicative of the level of trust in the Iranian-Afghan relationship that the Shah was able attract Afghanistan into participation in the treaty. Afghan leaders had always been unwaveringly neutral in their approach toward foreign affairs, and had recently even been wary of joining broadly popular international organizations without the participation of the Soviet Union.[247] This made Reza Shah's success in bringing Afghanistan into a regional pact

[245] The source here shows the word 'Empire' in the name of the treaty. It is only informally known as the Saadabad Pact because it was signed at Saadabad Palace. League of Nations Treaty Series, Volume 190, No. 4402, 'Treaty of Non-Aggression between the Kingdom of Afghanistan, the Kingdom of Iraq, the Empire of Iran and the Republic of Turkey, Signed at Teheran, July 8th, 1937,' p. 25, 27.
[246] Emphasis added. 'The Iranian Ministry for Foreign Affairs to the American Legation,' in FRUS, 1937, General, Volume I, Document 820, p. 801-2, 25/8/1937.
[247] Though the League of Nations was founded in January 1920, Afghanistan waited to join until just after the Soviet Union had joined in 1934.

a major feat; the only other state to do this since Afghanistan's independence in 1919 was the Soviet Union.[248]

Conclusion

Discussed in the forthcoming chapters in this dissertation, the consequence of the Great Game competition for Iran and Afghanistan was that the experience informed Iran's own strategy toward Afghanistan in the twentieth century when Iran and Afghanistan obtained more independence from those powers. This chapter has detailed how, since the creation of the Afghan state to the outbreak of World War II, Iranian-Afghan relations were developed from non-existent, due to great-power intrusion, to somewhat independent from it. However, the relationship and Iran's motivations behind it, were deeply informed by Iran's 18th and 19th century experiences with great-power domination and a resultant desire to use Afghanistan as part of an effort to restore her to a position of regional power. The examples of this laid out in this chapter culminated in Reza Shah's spearheading of the Saadabad Pact, a spin-off nonaggression treaty of one the Russians had pulled Iran and Afghanistan into years earlier. The pact was an act of Iranian political irredentism, for it was Iran's initiative, did not include a great power, and the territories of all the participating countries were at different stages under the control of the Persian Empire. These motivations and political manoeuvres continue in Iran's policy toward Afghanistan throughout the rest of the 20th century.

[248] That the Shah was successful in bringing the other states into a regional agreement was also notable. Bringing Iraq into the fold was likely challenging because since the creation of Iraq in 1921, Iran and Turkey had strained relations with her, mainly around continuous frontier disputes and overwhelming British control or influence in Iraqi affairs. For Turkey, generally considered a stronger power that was a source of emulation for all the other parties, participating in a non-Turkish-led regional agreement was likely humbling for Turkey and quite a boon for Iran.

Chapter Three: Iran's Afghanistan Policy and Regional Leadership under Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979)

Introduction

Throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, Afghanistan persisted in being important to the wider regional stability of the Middle East and South Asia as well as a battleground for influence amongst the great powers. As it still struggled to support itself financially and govern itself centrally, the major stakeholders in the region, including Iran, Pakistan, the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom all developed a vested strategic interest in influencing a weak Afghan government in their favour. As such, when Mohammad Daoud Khan conducted a coup in Afghanistan in July 1973—creating a 'republic' and unseating his family's monarchies that had ruled the country for over 150 years[249]—Afghanistan's neighbouring states and great-power patrons were forced to realign their policies toward a government that presented many new concerns for the region. In particular, Iran worried, in line with its historical preoccupation of foreign domination, that the Soviets had either orchestrated the coup or intended to use it to gain a significant foothold in the region to dominate and encircle them. Thus, this chapter is the second of three illustrative historical examples that demonstrate the way in which modern Iran has prioritised increasing its influence in Afghanistan, and leveraging that influence against the great powers competing in the region, in order to ultimately advance its regional position to the latter's detriment. The period surrounding the coup shows how the Shah of Iran came to see the 'Afghanistan problem' and growing Soviet influence there, as a major impediment to Iran's realization of regional dominance as well as to Iran's internal and external security. It will be argued here that by leveraging his concerns that Soviet expansionism in Afghanistan was a threat

[249] The Afghan Durrani family (the Barakzais were one of its clans) ruled Afghanistan centrally to varying degrees of success for 230 years, with the Barakzai (Daoud's lineage) for over 150 years. See: Barfield, *Afghanistan*, p. 170 and *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 'BĀRAKZĪ,' December 15, 1988. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/barakzi-singular-barakzay-an-ethnic-name-common-in-the-entire-eastern-portion-of-iran-and-afghanistan-where-it-is-found>.

to regional security, the Shah secured crucial American political and material support to advance a policy toward Afghanistan in the 1970s in which the Shah manipulated Daoud's new regime into a position of greater dependence on Iran and less on the Soviet Union. This enabled Iran, on its own terms, to successfully use Afghanistan to advance its regional position in competition with American and Soviet presence.

Background

The Regional Dynamic: Great Power Competition for Influence

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw several key transitions for the nations involved in Middle Eastern and South Asian affairs that largely resulted in the establishment of a bipolar system, where the United States and the Soviet Union, still embroiled in the Cold War, actively competed for an advantage by aligning with or asserting influence in each regional state. While the British had held a dominant role in the region for well over a century, their announcement to withdrawal from their role in 1968 and their decision to do so in 1971 left a power vacuum that the remaining world powers began to fill, whether out of ambition or obligation. While the U.S. stepped in and developed a strong alliance with Iran and Pakistan, the Soviets allied with Iraq, Afghanistan, and India. Of these states, Afghanistan became an important frontline in the competition between the U.S. and Soviets for regional influence for two key reasons: the country remained dedicated to projecting a non-aligned stance unlike its neighbours, and it also sat landlocked in the geographical crosshairs of Soviet and American proxies. As stated in 1971 in an American policy review from its Afghan embassy, 'a *modified* Great Game [was] still being played and, thus, a U.S. strategy for the Indian subcontinent…to counter the Soviet and Chinese efforts [had to] take Afghanistan into account.'[250]

For regional states like Iran and Afghanistan, the depth of their relationships with either the U.S. or the Soviet Union was integral to their level of power and their

[250] Emphasis added. Digital National Security Archive (DNSA hereafter), AF00005, Airgram from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 'Policy Review: A U.S. Strategy for the 70s,' 26/6/1971.

security. But securing this support had been difficult, particularly from the Americans, as their strategy in the Middle East and South Asia had not been a priority until after the Johnson administration due to America being bogged down in the Vietnam War. Due to American inexperience in a region that had historically been under the British sphere of influence, President Johnson had favoured a policy of balancing Iranian and Saudi Arabian power—which the British had long practiced—to avoid either country gaining too much power or primacy.[251] This was much to the chagrin of the Shah of Iran, who had lobbied Washington since the early 1960s to become its 'chosen instrument' in the Middle East by attempting to show that Iran was fulfilling several U.S. objectives in the region, including the establishment of friendly and productive relations with its neighbours.[252] Frustrated with the Johnson administration's inability to get Congress behind massive arms sales to Iran, the Shah adeptly played the United States and the Soviet Union off one another to pad the military arsenal he sought. While this included an Iranian-Soviet arms deal in early 1967, the Shah make assurances to the Americans that he would not buy sophisticated military equipment from the Soviets and thus did not derail American-Iranian arms agreements.[253]

However, in the year leading up to the Nixon administration (1969), the political atmosphere was heating up in the Middle East and South Asia, and the U.S.-Iranian relationship was changing. The Americans started looking to Iran for greater assistance in the region, which included tactical needs such as intelligence, communications, and overflight-facilities cooperation. They began saying in overtures that the U.S.-Iran relationship should be between 'equals', and that they found the Shah's self-reliant, 'vigorous asser[tion]' of Iran's regional interests as synonymous with U.S. interests.[254] Just days before Richard Nixon took office, the

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[251] Alvandi, Roham. *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War.* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 343-4.
[252] DNSA, IR00541, Telegram from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 23/11/1964.
[253] Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS), 1964-1968, Vol. XXII, 174. Telegram From the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 1035Z, *Military Sales to Iran,* 21/8/1966 and 185. Telegram From the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, 1330Z.2985 *Iranian Purchase of Soviet Arms*, 24/1/1967.
[254] DNSA, IR00702, Scope Paper, Department of State 'Visit of Amir Abbas Hoveyda, Prime Minister of Iran', 6/12/1968.

1969 National Intelligence Estimate reported that the 'Shah [was] seeking for Iran the position in regional affairs that he deem[ed] to be rightfully his' and yet warned that the United States was at risk of losing Iran to Soviet influence: 'The Shah now feels that Iran can and should be less dependent on the U.S. than in the past…his desire for a position of primacy in the Persian Gulf will pose problems for the U.S. and provide the USSR with opportunities for some expansion of its influence in Tehran.'[255]

Indeed, the Soviets had been busy at work building on their longstanding regional policy of courting and influencing Gulf Arab and South Asian states, including Afghanistan, well before the Afghan Coup of 1973. This started with the rise of Nikita Khrushchev in 1953, with the USSR pursuing vast financial and political influence in Iraq, Afghanistan, and India, countries that surrounded Iran and had a significant stake in regional politics.[256] In India, the Soviets had successfully cultivated significant political, economic, and military cooperation, most readily seen in the Soviet mediation (for India) during the Indo-Pakistani conflict in 1965, as well as a May 1968 arms treaty to sell the Indians 100 SU-7 fighter-bombers (after having already provided them sophisticated MIG 21 fighter jets and 500 tanks). This culminated in a 20-year Indo-Soviet treaty of friendship signed in May 1971, considered 'low obligation' for the Soviets, that served the purpose of formalizing and extending Soviet influence in the region while containing Chinese and American influence.[257] Similarly in Iraq, the Soviets increased political and military links with Iraq from the late 1950s, with relations hitting their peak from 1969 to 1973. This also led to a 15-year treaty of friendship and cooperation with Iraq in April 1972. Soviet relations with Afghanistan were largely consistent from the 1940s. The Soviets pursued a major economic assistance program in the 1950s, giving favourable aid terms for development projects to help cement its influence in Afghanistan.[258] The drive of this policy was a greater Soviet regional policy of 'Good

[255] CIA, National Intelligence Estimate, Washington, NIE 34–69, 10/1/1969, p. 1.
[256] Bowker, Michael. *Russia, America and the Islamic World*. (Hampshire, 2007), p. 28.
[257] For more information about Soviet-Indian and Soviet-Pakistani relations in the 1960s-1970s, see Donaldson, Robert H., 'India: The Soviet Stake in Stability,' *Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (June 1972), pp. 475-492.
[258] Bowker, *Russia,* p. 28.

Neighbourliness,' extending aid to neighbouring states as a way of influencing their behaviour.[259]

Foreign priorities shifted for the Americans as this picture became clearer and they realized the region could quickly become a national security threat for America and its allies as confrontation with the USSR would now most likely occur in the Gulf and South Asia.[260] This became an opportunity for regional powers to cement their relations with the great powers and serve as their proxies, a development of which the Shah of Iran would take full advantage. This was at first evident in the case of the major regional crisis prior to the Afghan Coup of 1973, the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. During this crisis, U.S.-backed West Pakistan violently repressed an uprising for independence by Soviet-backed East Pakistan, or modern-day Bangladesh, which turned into a war between Pakistan and India (which supported East Pakistan). As India had just signed its Treaty of Friendship with the USSR, West Pakistan, concerned that India and the Soviets would come to East Pakistan's aid, pre-emptively struck Indian military structures. However, this move backfired and actually drew India into the conflict. While the U.S. supported West Pakistan against a Soviet-allied India, Congress refused to allow the transfer of American arms to West Pakistan in order to commit what was effectively genocide. In order to prevent its ally from disintegrating and causing a regional crisis, Nixon secretly made a deal with the Shah to transfer Iranian weapons, some of which they had bought from the Americans, from Iran to West Pakistan.[261] West Pakistan inevitably failed to defeat the Indians and Bengalis, but the crisis became the first of many examples in which Nixon relied heavily on the Shah, trusting him to carry out some of the most sensitive U.S. policy objectives in the region. As discussed below, the Nixon Doctrine was the prerequisite for Iran to be chosen as a U.S. proxy to maintain stability in the region, which had a profound and lasting effect on the Shah's ability to assert his own regional influence and attain his long-desired goal of regional primacy.

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[259] Racioppi, Linda. *Soviet Policy Towards South Asia Since 1970*, (Cambridge: 1994), pp. 84-85.
[260] DNSA, KT00512, Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, 30/5/1972.
[261] NSA, Electronic Briefing Book No. 79, 'The Tilt: The U.S. and the South Asian Crisis of 1971,' 16/12/2002.

The Nixon Doctrine, Iran's Western Alignment, and Iran's Regional Primacy

Iran's regional role shifted drastically during the years of the Nixon administration (1969-1974) during which the Shah's decidedly Western alignment and Nixon's regional policy cleared the way for greater Iranian political and military dominance in the region and for the Shah to assert his foreign policy nearly autonomously. The Americans saw a great role for Iran in countering Soviet regional expansionism, which the Shah was eager to fulfil due to ambition and his extreme paranoia about soviet encirclement.[262]

By the beginning of the Nixon administration in 1969, a way had been paved for what became the divergent regional policies of Nixon's White House when compared to previous American administrations. This is most exemplified in the creation of the Nixon Doctrine as the principle on which Nixon's foreign policy was based. The premise as applied to the Middle East and South Asia (or the 'Third World' in general, as his administration referred to it) was to limit direct U.S. involvement in regional affairs, and allow allied regional actors to look after U.S. interests, while encouraging individual states to handle their affairs themselves.[263] Scholar Roham Alvandi, an expert on the Nixon administration's relations with the Shah, notes that this idea became hugely popular in the wake of deep U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the need for the administration to focus on its more 'pressing' international agenda, including the achievement of secret détente with China and the containment of Soviet power.[264] As the official policy strategy of the executive branch, the increased reliance of the U.S. government on regional allies meant that Iran could finally capitalize on this opportunity to become the major client of the United States for the greater Middle East. However, when Nixon decided he would at first pursue a 'dual-pillar' strategy, encouraging the strength of both the Saudis and the Iranians while crafting his regional policy, the Shah had to leverage

[262] DNSA, KT00512, Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, (Reza Shah Pahlavi, President Nixon, Henry Kissinger Meeting at Royal Palace in Tehran), 30/5/1972.
[263] FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol I, Report by President Nixon to the Congress, 'U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: A New Strategy for Peace', Doc. 60, 18/2/1970, and 'Editorial Note,' Doc. 9, n.d.
[264] Alvandi, *Nixon,* p. 371.

whatever he could to find a way to be chosen as America's sole pillar, something that he felt guaranteed Iran's regional primacy.[265] Therefore, the Nixon Doctrine was an important determinant in Iran's pursuance of a position of regional leadership in the 1970s, the Shah's main goal for Iran's international standing.

It did not take long for the Shah to convince President Nixon to support Iranian regional primacy by choosing Iran as *the* main vehicle through which American regional policy would be represented and pursued. Unlike the policies of President Johnson and the British, who held many concerns about the political and economic consequences of Iran's regional ambitions, President Nixon was the first to view this as a positive, not negative, thing for American and Iranian interests.[266] In addition to Nixon's close personal relationship with the Shah, which began nearly two decades before Nixon took office, Nixon's stance on Iran can be largely attributed to the Shah's active lobbying campaign as he began asserting Iran as the prime candidate to be an American proxy and regional leader early in the Nixon administration.[267]

Stateside, the debate around the question of Iran's relationship with the U.S. shifted to the extent that by 1970, even those in the upper echelons of Nixon's national security apparatus were calling attention to the Shah's efforts. In a memorandum to Henry Kissinger, Director of the CIA Richard Helms emphasized that the president should 'further utilize' the relationship with Iran in making his regional policy, giving the Shah the type of 'special relationship' that he had been asking for and prioritizing the Shah's aid and assistance requests. Helms noted that this was pertinent given the high-value intelligence that the CIA had been getting from Iran on Soviet movements in the region and that lately some collection efforts on the ground in Iran had been denied by the Shah.[268] Not only were the Americans so unestablished in the region in 1970 that they needed Iran as a base for collecting crucial regional intelligence, but the Shah's attempts to leverage this with the

[265] Ibid, pp. 353-4.
[266] Ibid, p. 365.
[267] Ibid, pp. 347-48, 41.
[268] FRUS, 1969-1972, E-4, Memorandum From Harold Saunders of the National Security Council Staff to Henry Kissinger, 'Iran', 16/4/1970, Doc. 63.

Americans to get what he wanted was working. As time progressed and Iran became closer to the United States, these points of Iranian leverage over the Americans became even more commonplace.

The year 1972 was pivotal for Iran in securing its role as the 'main pillar' of Nixon's foreign policy in the region, and while this time marked the apex of the U.S.-Iranian relationship, it also saw the further development of Iranian regional primacy. There is a clear shift in roles in the documentary record as Iran cemented its relationship with the Nixon administration while it also asserted itself as a regional power *separate* from the United States. Following the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 and the increased concern over the possibility of confrontation with the USSR in the Middle East and South Asia, the Nixon administration was indebted to Iran and has also planned to make a strong American showing at the Moscow Summit in May 1972.[269] Prior to this summit, an official in Nixon's senior foreign policy team made his case to Nixon that America should cement its special relationship with Iran, regardless of what it meant for relations with other regional countries. In a meeting in January 1972, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Joseph Sisco suggested that President Nixon make his first stop to Iran after the Moscow Summit in order to send a message to the Shah that he would continue to have American support at a time when the Shah's concerns were fixated on the increasing Soviet influence in his immediate neighbourhood.[270] This was a vote of confidence made by the same official that Nixon had tasked in 1970 with conducting an enquiry into whether Iran would be fit to act as the primary power in the region. Prioritizing Iran in this unprecedented way showed the beginnings of a tilt by the Nixon administration toward Iranian primacy and away from its inherited dual-pillar strategy, especially considering that an American president had not visited Iran since President Eisenhower over 13 years prior.[271]

Nixon's decision to make his first stop after the Moscow Summit to Iran to see the Shah indicated his personal approval of growing Iranian primacy and the

[269] FRUS, 1969-1972, E-4, Backchannel Message From the Henry Kissinger to the Embassy in Singapore for Former Secretary of the Treasury Connally, 29/6/1972, Doc. 209.
[270] FRUS, 1969-1972, E-7, Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting, 19/1/1972, Doc. 210.
[271] Alvandi, *Nixon,* pp. 354, 369.

selection of Iran over others to help carry out American foreign policy in the region. In a top-secret memorandum of the conversation between Nixon and the Shah in Tehran, the Shah immediately pressed Nixon about his concerns over Soviets involvement in his region, to which Nixon responded that while the Soviets were focused on security concerns rather than spreading communism, they were indeed trying to dominate the Middle East. To assuage his worries, Nixon told the Shah that he appreciated the 'active role' Iran had been taking in South Asia and confirmed that his visit to Iran on this important occasion was to show 'the United States' strong support for their regional allies', who he would not let down. The Shah's response to this was to emphasize that key areas of the region could not be neglected and allowed exposure to Soviet influence, enabling the USSR to get to Iran through a client such as India or through a coalition of communist groups in Iran's surrounding area. In keeping with previous concerns that Iran might not be up for the task of unilaterally handling regional problems, Nixon suggested that perhaps the U.S. Navy should be in the Persian Gulf. The Shah immediately rebuffed this idea, putting forth that Iran wanted to exclude all other major powers now that the British had withdrawn from the region, and asserted that Iran was the only country capable of dealing with any regional situation without outside assistance from any other nation.[272] It is here that the Shah fully makes it clear to Nixon that Iran intended to be *the* primary regional power, and despite this being the point at which Iran and the U.S. were the closest in their relationship, he asserts his regional power as something that must be separate from that of the United States. Showing his acceptance of this change of status quo, in their meetings the next day, Nixon said to the Shah, 'Don't look at [our relationship] as something that weakens you' and goes as far as saying, 'Protect me'.[273]

Therefore, just over a year before a coup d'état struck Afghanistan, creating an even weaker neighbouring state vulnerable to Soviet influence, Iran had successfully become America's chosen instrument in a region where managing these

[272] DNSA, KT00512, Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, (Reza Shah Pahlavi, President Nixon, Henry Kissinger Meeting at Royal Palace in Tehran), 30/5/1972.
[273] FRUS, 1969–1976, E-4, Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, May 31, 1972. Doc. 201. 31/5/1972.

risks became essential for fending off Soviet expansionism and ensuring regional stability.

The Afghanistan Problem

In the lead up to and following the Coup of 1973, Afghanistan's weak governance and the infighting of regional powers for influence there became a central challenge to the stability of South Asia and the greater Middle East. As such, Iran came to increasingly push (for itself and the United States) an agenda of strong relations with a sustainable government in Afghanistan as crucial for containing Soviet regional expansionism.

Since the establishment of the Afghan state, Afghanistan had been run with varied degrees of success by a series of autocratic monarchs with distinctly Pashtun tribal lineages. Prior to the coup in 1973, the King of Afghanistan Zahir Shah had found it increasingly difficult to manage his government's bureaucracy, classed by the Shah of Iran as 'lazy' in handling affairs of state.[274] Afghan society until this point had been described by the U.S. and Iran as being distinctly insular, even xenophobic[275]: while the Afghan King hoped to attain economic aid and build relationships with foreign nations, the more conservative elements of the Afghan parliament did what they could to obstruct him by expressing concern about Afghanistan's internal affairs being run by neighbours, let alone foreign powers.[276] In addition to political instability and societal grievances, which only worsened prior to the coup, there was a major threat of Afghan disintegration due to continued economic instability. In 1970, Afghanistan could not support itself financially without economic aid from major foreign donors.[277] Given Afghanistan's internal struggles and land-locked geographical location bordering Western-allied Iran and

[274] Ibid.
[275] DNSA, AF00170, Cable from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, 'Political Summary: March 1-31, 1974', 31/3/1974; DNSA, AF00187, Cable from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, 'Annual Policy Assessment', March 1975.
[276] FRUS, 1969-1972, E-7, Telegram 616 from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 1/2/1972, Doc. 353.
[277] FRUS, 1969-1972, E-7, Intelligence Note, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, 29/7/1971, Doc. 339.

Pakistan as well as Soviet Russia, the United States and Iran became increasingly concerned that Afghanistan was very vulnerable to massive Soviet influence and possible (but unlikely) Soviet military intervention.[278]

Afghanistan's history of obtaining Soviet economic and military aid and the longstanding nature of Soviet-Afghan relations made this an even more potent threat. The United States and Iran put much effort into analysing possible Soviet intentions and policy for Afghanistan in the early 1970s in order to determine if the Soviets intended to utilize Afghanistan to exercise expansionism in South Asia as either a part of their communist ideology or their security strategy.[279] As these allies had recently seen growing Soviet influence in Iraq as a major threat to Iran and Gulf security, they feared that Afghanistan had become the next area of Soviet incursion in the region.[280] Both of these scenarios would impact Iran and the United States, as the location and reach of Iran bridged the two regions of Western and Soviet influence. As mentioned, unlike Iraq, which did not have strong relations with Russia until the late 1950s, Afghanistan had a longer history of deep involvement with Russia.

Soviet relations with its southern Afghan neighbour were largely consistent from the 1940s; however, with the rise of Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1953, which coincided with Daoud Khan's first premiership, their relations saw unprecedented heights.[281] By January 1954, Daoud signed an agreement with the USSR to expand trade and transit facilities, and had received a Soviet loan of $3.5 million to build grain silos and bakeries. From an Afghan perspective, most Soviet technical aid and loans were for projects that had an immediate impact on the local population, unlike contemporaneous American aid. Showing Afghanistan's importance to Khrushchev, he made a trip to Afghanistan in 1955 and agreed to

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[278] FRUS, 1969-1972, E-7, Country Policy Statement on Afghanistan, Department of State, 6/8/1969, Doc. 326.
[279] FRUS, 1969-1972, E-7, Intelligence Note, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, 29/7/1971, Doc. 339.
[280] FRUS, 1969-1972, E-7, Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting, 19/1/1972, Doc. 210; FRUS, Vol XXVII, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 24/7/1973, Doc. 27. Roham Alvandi argues that containing Soviet influence in Iraq was one of his and Nixon's primary reason for supporting Iranian regional hegemony. This work shows that Afghanistan, with a much longer history of Soviet involvement, also played a role. See Alvandi, Roham. 'Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: the origins of Iranian primacy in the Persian Gulf', *Diplomatic History*, 36 (2). pp. 361-364.
[281] Bowker, *Russia*, p. 28.

provide a large $100 million loan to fund many major infrastructure projects as part of Afghanistan's first Five-Year Plan for national development. This Soviet-financed plan included two hydroelectric plants, a road from Kabul to the USSR border, a new airport in Bagram, and port facilities at the Oxus River.[282] Soviet influence also extended into military supplies, when similar Afghan requests to the Americans had been repeatedly met with refusals. This prompted the Soviet Union to fill the need, becoming the main supplier to the Afghan armed forces. The USSR's first arms deal with Afghanistan, worth $25 million, was signed in 1956. The Soviets continued extending its influence in the military arena despite getting little return on investment: from 1960-1968 the Soviet provided Afghanistan with $120 million worth of arms in exchange for just $70 million in Afghan raw materials.[283] Additionally, beginning in 1961, the USSR and Czechoslovakia (then part of the Soviet bloc) began training programmes for Afghan soldiers. By 1970, around 7000 junior Afghan officers were trained in the USSR and Czechoslovakia, compared to only 600 in America and far fewer in Turkey, India, and Britain. In this way, Russian special interest and investment in Afghanistan was clearly separate from and superior to American and other international interest in Afghanistan during this period. Afghanistan was one of the five favoured nations (including Egypt, India, Indonesia and Iraq) that received over two-thirds of total Soviet aid up to 1968. The Soviet Union was the largest Afghan investor, committing $900 million (60 per cent of all Afghan aid funding) between 1957 and 1972, not including an additional $300 million in military loans.[284]

The Shah consistently prodded the Americans in 1971 about this growing Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, with the Americans finally coming to the conclusion that it was too significant to ignore. Both parties were aware of the massive amounts of financial and military assistance the Soviets were giving to the Afghans as well as the extensive Afghan-Soviet trading and military training partnerships. However, it also concerned them that the Afghan government had been

[282] Hyman, Anthony. *Afghanistan Under Soviet Domination, 1964-1983.* (London: 1982) p. 28.
[283] Ibid, p. 29.
[284] Ibid, p. 34.

allowing Soviet-backed Afghan agents to be places in key Afghan ministries to ensure that Soviet intelligence could operate in the country without limitations.[285] The Soviets had also employed successful propaganda on a cultural and civilian level, as they had for years infiltrated the institutions of education in Afghanistan by opening polytechnic universities, initiating educational exchanges for Afghans to study in Moscow and providing scholarships to enable them to do so.[286] In a policy review to draft a U.S. strategy for Afghanistan in the 1970s, the State Department concluded that the USSR was *the* world power most influencing Afghanistan, and while the Afghan government was not constantly acting on Soviet orders, it was 'rare' for them to act in a way the Soviets did not want. The document also made the salient point that due to this influence, the Afghan communist movement was growing in power, 'especially amongst students and urban lower-level professionals.'[287]

These realities brought two key threats to the Iranians into sharp relief, both of which centred on the regional ramifications if a left-leaning or Soviet-backed government was established in Afghanistan: the creation of an independent Pashtun/Baluchi state (or its absorption into Afghanistan) through which the Soviets could access the Indian Ocean, and the disruption of the Shah's quest for an Iranian-led regional cooperative based upon strong Iranian relations with neighbouring states. Discussed previously, and seen throughout the British and American documentary record, the Shah had been obsessed by, and warning his allies for years about, Soviet encirclement of Iran and Pakistan. In the scenario he imagined, the Soviets would use their influence in Afghanistan as part of a Soviet 'grand design' to develop a stronghold in the Indian Ocean, which represented a major threat to Iranian and American regional power.[288] An American policy review from 1971 recalls that the Shah most feared a situation in which the Soviets influenced Afghanistan to the point where they could use her territory to gain access to the Indian Ocean by going

[285] DNSA, AF0005, Airgram from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 'Policy Review: A U.S. Strategy for the 70s', 26/6/1971.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.
[288] DNSA, AF00035, Cable from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, 'Iranian Reaction to the Coup', July 1973.

through the large and unstable Pashtun and Baluchi tribal areas surrounding Afghanistan's borders with Pakistan and Iran. These tribal areas, if bolstered into independence by Afghanistan or Russia (a 'state' often referred to as Pashtunistan or Baluchistan), would be problematic. This was not only because it could lead to the territorial disintegration of Pakistan and Iran (both Western allies), but it would give the Soviets a regional advantage by ensuring their control of previously non-aligned Afghanistan, the build-up of the Russian navy in the Indian Ocean, and Soviet access to or control of major trade routes that had to this point been regulated by the Iranians.[289]

Relatedly, Iran had viewed expanding bilateral relations with a Zahir Shah's government as part of its wider objective of creating an Iranian-led economic and security cooperative with countries surrounding the Indian Ocean. In the Shah's own words, he had spent much of the late 1960s and early 1970s pursuing 'a neighbourly foreign policy' with these countries with the objective of establishing an Iranian-led 'peaceful and stable zone from whence American and Soviet intervention were excluded.'[290] Afghanistan, as a landlocked nation through which major trade routes to Pakistan and Central Asia ran, was a key piece in the puzzle. The Shah had succeeded in forming solid alliances with Turkey and Pakistan, both of which had already joined CENTO, a different, pro-Western regional alliance, in 1955. However, Afghanistan had pointedly avoiding doing so, seeing it as a threat to her nonaligned status and a potential irritant to increasing relations with the USSR.[291] Indeed, the Shah later recalled Soviet irritation about Iran's involvement in CENTO, which Khrushchev said was 'an aggressive pact directed against ourselves.'[292] The Shah's solution was to attempt to make Afghanistan less dependent on the Soviets and part of his sphere

[289] DNSA, AF0005, Airgram from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 'Policy Review: A U.S. Strategy for the 70s', 26/6/1971.
[290] Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza. *The Shah's Story: An Autobiography*, (London: 1980), pp. 132, 135-7. It is interesting that the Shah terms his foreign policy as 'neighbourly', as it was in direct competition, but perhaps modeled from, the USSR's similarly termed 'neighbourly' foreign policy of expanding influence its influence amongst its neighbours in the region. See FCO 37/1009, *Folio 8: 'Brief for the Secretary of State's Meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister, 1 June*', 1/6/1972.
[291] Hyman, *Afghanistan,* pp. 47-8.
[292] Pahlavi, *Shah's Story,* p. 133. In response to this, the Shah told Khrushchev, that CENTO was 'a defensive pact' and Khrushchev retorted, 'Don't make me laugh with your pacts…You know perfectly well that we could flatten England with seven atom bombs, and Turkey with twelve.'

of influence by linking Afghanistan to his planned Indian Ocean trade collective, centred at Iran's port facility at Bandar Abbas.[293] The Iranian-promoted benefits to the Afghans included reduced dependence on Pakistani and Soviet trade facilities, access to European markets through Iran's border with Turkey as well as the Persian Gulf, decreased cost of exports (especially meat) and the building of roads and possibly railroads in Afghan territory to better link it to Iran and facilitate the plan.[294] However, essential to building the necessary infrastructure between Iran and Afghanistan was the settling of the centuries-long dispute over the Helmand River waters. Flooded Helmand River banks made such trade transit impossible on roads in the border areas. In late 1972 and early 1973, there was considerable American and Asian Development Bank interest in financing the building of these roads, but their funding was contingent on Iran and Afghanistan solving their complex water dispute.[295] According to the Shah's Foreign Minister Abbas Ali Khalatbari, the Iranians had been carefully lobbying Zahir Shah into such cooperation in the years prior to his ouster. When Iran and Afghanistan finally succeeded, in March 1973, in signing their agreement over the Helmand waters, Khalatbari told British officials that it had '[put] in place one of the final pieces in the [Iranian] government's policy, over the past two or three years, of seeking friendly relations with her neighbours and near neighbours,' clearly a reference to Iran's wider regional goals.[296] Unfortunately for Iran, the agreement had yet to be fully ratified by the Afghan parliament before the Afghan coup unseated Zahir Shah's government in July 1973, leading Iranian officials to fear that years of their efforts had potentially been wasted, should Daoud Khan's new government refuse to honour the recently struck agreement between Iran and Afghanistan.[297]

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[293] FCO 37/1224, *Folio 21: British Embassy Tehran* (hereafter Tehran) *to the Middle East Department, FCO* (hereafter MED), 3/5/1973.
[294] Kayhan International (Iranian press), 'Comment Kabul Accord' and 'Free Port on Persian Gulf Will Aid Afghan Trade', 2/11/1969 included in FCO 17/143, *Folios 1-3: Kabul to FCO*, 6/11/1968; FCO 37/1009, *Folio 33: Tehran to MED,* 28/9/1972.
[295] FCO 37/1224, *Folio 10: British Embassy Kabul* (hereafter Kabul) *to the South Asia Department, FCO* (hereafter SAD), 21/2/1973; FCO 37/1224, *Folio 3: Kabul to SAD*, 29/1/1973.
[296] FCO 37/1224, *Folio 14: Cable from Tehran to FCO*, 15/3/1973.
[297] FCO 37/1224, *Folio 29: 'Lord Carrington's Visit to Iran: Afghanistan',* 26/9/1973*;* FCO 37/1224, *Folio 30: Tehran to SAD*, 2/10/1973.

Therefore, a country that had in recent decades been of little or no direct interest to the West (and even the Iranians) suddenly became a potential roadblock to the Iranian and American regional strategy for countering Soviet dominance.[298] And Afghanistan, unlike Pakistan or any of the surrounding regional states, was more of a liability because of its already considerable Soviet influence and lack of U.S. influence, its internal political instability, and its border issues with Pakistan and Iran that presented a vulnerable entryway for the Soviets to access the Indian Ocean. While the U.S. had favoured Iran to represent its regional interests by 1972, it was still concerned that Iran's resources to handle such severe foreign problems remained limited, and it pointed out that Iran's potential to serve as a strong, stabilizing regional power against the Soviets could be damaged by a 'suddenly erratic or internally distraught Afghanistan'.[299]

Seeing that Afghanistan was set to become the lynchpin in a very delicate regional security system, the Shah became determined to address the Afghanistan issue in a way that ensured the realization of Iran's foreign policy interests. This manifested partially in the Shah offering his help to the Americans in dealing with Afghanistan in order to prove Iran's ability to fulfil its role as the sole pillar of Nixon's Middle East policy and as a regional leader in competition with an increasingly aggressive Soviet Union. This is evident when in May 1972 the Shah asked Nixon outright to be his proxy for Pakistan and Afghanistan. The President accepted the Shah's proposal and said that he felt it was a 'good idea'.[300] Moving forward in this capacity, the Shah increasingly reported about Afghanistan in an alarmist way to elicit a specific policy response from the Nixon administration. In a memorandum from the Director of the CIA to Kissinger over a year before the coup, the Shah is described as 'disturbed' over events in the subcontinent that could lead to the possible fragmentation of Pakistan, namely 'Soviet capabilities in

[298] DNSA, AF0005, Airgram from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 'Policy Review: A U.S. Strategy for the 70s', 26/6/1971.
[299] NSA, AF00007, Airgram from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 'United States Mission in Afghanistan: 1972 Policy Review, Report of the Kandahar Conference April 21-24, 1972', 24/4/1972.
[300] NSA, KT00512, Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, (Reza Shah Pahlavi, President Nixon, Henry Kissinger Meeting at Royal Palace in Tehran), 30/5/1972.

Afghanistan'.[301] Recalling the Indo-Pakistani War that had occurred just months earlier, the Shah urged President Nixon to do everything in his power to make Pakistan and Afghanistan viable considering that any further disintegration of these vulnerable states could directly impact areas in south and eastern Iran.[302] This was an obvious reference to the border areas of Afghanistan with Pakistan and Iran (Baluchistan and Pashtunistan), which the Shah saying, 'the main problem now [was] getting West Pakistan in order'. Nixon agreed.[303] Just two months before the Afghan coup, the Shah had continued to make a pressing case about Afghanistan. He asserted that any more trouble in Pakistan could incite the Soviets into making a deal with Afghanistan that would provide the USSR with a direct route to the Indian Ocean by inciting Baluchi and Pashtun separatism.[304] Despite whether the Soviets did or did not intend to carry out such a policy, the Shah's perception of its inevitability, his consequent warnings to Nixon, and the eventual coup of the pro-Soviet Daoud Khan in 1973, steered the Shah's policy in a way that established Iran as the authority on issues pertaining to Soviet penetration in South Asia.

As the following section will show, Nixon's support for the Shah's Afghanistan agenda showed in his willingness to politically and materially support Iran against the threats the Shah had so successfully convinced him were coming from Afghanistan.

Iran, the United States, and Soviet Encroachment in Afghanistan

Much like the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, the Afghan Coup of 1973 was a crisis that had the potential to present significant challenges to regional security. As discussed, this problem resonated most with the Shah, who had long been aware of the developments in Afghanistan that could lead to Soviet expansionism. Seeking the

[301] FRUS, 1969-1972, E-4, Memorandum from the Director Richard Helms, Central Intelligence Agency Henry Kissinger, 8/5/1972, Doc. 190.
[302] FRUS, 1969-1972, E-4, Backchannel Message From the Henry Kissinger to the Embassy in Singapore for Former Secretary of the Treasury Connally, 29/6/1972, Doc. 209.
[303] NSA, KT00512, Memorandum of Conversation, Tehran, (Reza Shah Pahlavi, President Nixon, Henry Kissinger Meeting at Royal Palace in Tehran), 30/5/1972.
[304] FRUS, 1969-1972, Vol XXVII, Telegram 1356Z from the Deputy Secretary of State Rush to the Department of State in Geneva, 27/4/1973, Doc. 14.

support of the U.S. and Pakistan, the events that followed the 1973 coup show the Shah's decision to take the lead in managing the Afghanistan situation in order to mitigate any possible threat to Iran's regional dominance and Iran's and Pakistan's territorial integrity. Discussed here is the general outline of the events of the coup and why they correlated with concerns of Soviet involvement, the regional and great-power reactions to the coup, the actions of the Shah immediately following the coup, and lastly, how Iranian policy toward Afghanistan became even more important for Iran's pursuit of a regional leadership role in the Middle East and South Asia.

The Afghan Coup of 1973

> A black day: there has been a coup d'etat in Afghanistan. Sardar Davoud Khan, ex-Prime Minister, cousin of the [Afghan] King and husband of the King's own sister, has masterminded a plot against his royal brother-in-law. What a filthy world we live in….The news has come as a dreadful shock to [the Shah], especially since Davoud, though a wealthy landowner, is markedly pro-Soviet…Nevertheless we could cope with all this, were it not for the position of the Afghan military. Every officer in her army has undergone training in the Soviet Union and no doubt been brainwashed into Marxism….It will not be long before Davoud himself falls victim to a military coup, and we shall be faced with a situation no less calamitous than that which plagues us in Iraq.
>
> -Assadollah Alam, 17 July 1973[305]

The Afghan Coup of 1973 was an important turning point for Iranian foreign policy toward Afghanistan: convinced that it had taken place under Soviet encouragement and that it had resulted in the ascendency of a proven pro-Soviet leader, the event spurred the Shah into taking a more aggressive stance on Afghanistan to protect Iran's regional position. As this section will show, part of this was leveraging the importance of the Soviet threat through Afghanistan to obtain further American political and material support for Iran.

Mentioned previously, the military coup that took place on July 17, 1973, establishing the Republic of Afghanistan, was conducted by Mohammad Daoud

[305] Assadollah Alam, the Shah's Minister of Court, was the latter's most trusted advisor. See, Alam, Assadollah. *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1968-77.* (London: 2008), p. 305.

Khan, who placed himself as president while ousting his cousin, King of Afghanistan Mohammad Zahir Shah, during the latter's trip to Italy for medical treatment. This transition of power ended over 150 years of continuous monarchic rule by a member of the Barakzai family. However dramatic this shift in Afghanistan's political structure may have seemed, little changed as Zahir Shah had spent much of his later reigning years effectively taking orders from Daoud and his other family members before finally being overthrown.[306] The coup was considered to be relatively bloodless, and Zahir Shah decided to abdicate the throne remotely rather than risk internal conflict that could result in a devastating civil war.[307]

The main issue of controversy surrounding the coup was to what extent the Soviets had known about or been involved in the planning or execution of the coup. One early indicator was the issue of international recognition for Afghanistan's new government. Each player on the regional chessboard watched closely as states came forward to recognize, and therefore internationally legitimize, the new Afghan republic. Within just a few days after the coup, the first states to recognize the Daoud's regime were Czechoslovakia, a communist state within the Eastern Bloc, and India, a close ally of the Soviets, something that the Shah found very revealing and wanted to consider before Iran recognized the new republic.[308] The USSR itself recognized Afghanistan shortly thereafter, quick to establish relations with the new state. While this made their interests quite clear, the record shows that despite Iranian assertions, the British and Americans were not entirely convinced of direct Soviet involvement in the coup, though they suspected Soviet foreknowledge. However, both the Americans and British were as convinced as the Shah that there was Soviet grand design for the region and that Afghanistan played a role in that.[309] The

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[306] Barfield, p. 307.
[307] Ansary, Tamim. *Games without Rules: The Often-Interrupted History of Afghanistan,* (New York, 2012), p. 176.
[308] National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), National Archives Central Foreign Policy File Online (hereafter AAD), Cable 05087 from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, Embassy in Afghanistan, Embassy in Pakistan, et al, 'Relations with Afghan Regime', 21/7/1973.
[309] Ibid; DNSA, AF00109, Cable from Department of State to Embassies in Pakistan, United Kingdom, Nepal, USSR, India, Iran, 'Republic of Afghanistan: Prospects', 26/7/1973; FCO 37/1224, *Folio 28: Eastern European and Soviet Department, FCO to SAD,* 17/9/1973; FCO 37/1224, *Folio 29: 'Lord Carrington's Visit to Iran: Afghanistan',* 26/9/1973.

Americans even approached the Soviets on the Shah's claims regardless of their doubts. When pressed by U.S. officials, Moscow denied direct involvement in the Afghan coup, saying that their early recognition did not mean complicity in or foreknowledge of the coup.[310]

Part of what convinced Iran and Pakistan of direct Soviet involvement in the coup were their suspicions surrounding Daoud Khan. As mentioned, it was under Daoud's premiership of Afghanistan from 1953-1963 that the country saw a great expansion in relations with the Soviet Union. During that period, Daoud had been the champion of the Pashtunistan issue, which the Shah and others suspected he had been pressured to pursue by the Soviets (for Soviet access the Indian Ocean). In fact, Daoud's antagonistic position on the issue resulted in the disastrous cessation of diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan for a fourteen-month period until his termination from government.[311] It did not help ease regional concerns that Daoud was well known for his close personal and political associations with the Soviet Union and that he visited his son, who was studying there, frequently.[312]

Additionally, when Daoud wrested power in July 1973, it came as no surprise that he did so with a support base comprised mainly of communist sympathizers including young, left-leaning students and army officers, many of whom had been trained or educated in the Soviet Union or in Soviet-run facilities in Afghanistan.[313] Mahmud Foroughi, one of the Shah's closest advisors on Afghanistan, told British officials that the coup was initiated by young military officers who asked Daoud to lead it, but he at first refused. Foroughi claimed that only when the coup was imminent and the officers asked Daoud again did he decide to lead them, the concern being that communist forces, possibly directed by the Soviets, were the catalyst for the coup and Daoud simply their figurehead. Foroughi lamented that the change in the regime was counter to Iranian interests in that it foreshadowed unrest on the Iranian border and was a resounding setback to the recent improvement in

[310] DNSA, AF00130, Cable Embassy in USSR to Department of State**,** August 1973.
[311] DNSA, AF00012, Cable from Embassy in Afghanistan Department of State, 'Afghan Coup: Initial Assessment', July 1973.
[312] DNSA, AF00015, Cable from Embassy in Iran Department of State, 'Prince Daoud, July 1973.
[313] DNSA, AF00035, Cable from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, 'Iranian Reaction to the Coup', July 1973.

Afghanistan's relations towards Iran.[314] This and Daoud's actions and allegiances remained very much in question, especially by the highly suspicious and paranoid Mohammad Reza Shah, who maintained his previously described mantras regarding Soviet encirclement.[315]

Leveraging the Coup with the Americans

In line with the Shah's earlier lobbying efforts, the coup finally offered the 'proof' of a Soviet threat through Afghanistan that Iran could leverage with the Americans to gain the political and material support it needed to assert a stronger leadership position in the region. There are several accounts of the Shah's meetings, conversations, and other communications about his concerns and plans for Afghanistan during this period that demonstrate this. This section analyses how the Shah reacted to the situation in Afghanistan and how he portrayed it to the Americans, including what he said about the coup and Daoud Khan and what those accounts achieved for Iran. Later in this case, it will be shown how this correlated with his actual implementation of Iran's Afghanistan policy. It is concluded that despite Iran's alignment with the United States and continuous assurances that it wanted to represent American interests in Afghanistan and the region that it was in fact the Shah's priority to leverage the threat in Afghanistan to further his *own* interests as part of a larger effort to assert Iran's position as a regional power, something the Nixon administration freely permitted.

As reflected in the quote above, Iran's initial response to the coup in Afghanistan was of genuine concern and deeply defensive. Directly after the coup Iranian officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed concerns to the American Embassy in Tehran that the coup was likely Soviet backed or encouraged, that Daoud's return in particular would have quite a negative impact on Afghan/Pakistani relations, and that they were 'certain' that even if the USSR was not involved in planning the coup, the Soviets would plan to take advantage of the

[314] FCO 37/1224, *Folio 30: Tehran to SAD*, 2/10/1973.
[315] Alam, *The Shah and I,* p. 305. DNSA, AF00035, Cable from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, 'Iranian Reaction to the Coup', July 1973.

outcome.[316] The Iranians were shocked that the coup had come off, not that the event was altogether unexpected given the former King's inadequate governance, but that they saw Daoud's ability to successfully conduct it as indicative of greater Soviet designs on the region. The Iranian viewpoint on this matter was certainly enough to alert the Americans that the Shah was convinced of the coup's potentially destabilizing effect on regional security.[317]

Iran's early reactions to the coup also display the Shah's eagerness to assert Iran as the authority on regional issues, particularly Afghanistan. Iranian officials very clearly stated that the coup was evidence of their theories about Soviet intentions for Afghanistan, which in their estimation, proved their view correct against the uninformed opinion of the Americans, who consistently demurred that there was a lack of proof of Soviet designs for control in Afghanistan.[318] Several days after the coup during a conversation between the Shah's closest advisor, Assadollah Alam, and Douglas Heck, the Minister-Counselor of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Alam declared that it was difficult for Iranian officials not to take an 'I told you so' position regarding the coup in Afghanistan. He stated that the Shah and others had known this could happen for a long time. Alam said the Iranians had even warned the Afghan King for many years that there was a 'Trojan horse' being built up under the King's nose due to his choice to have such close relations with the Soviets and allowing them to train Afghan troops that could eventually oppose and overthrow him. Alam advised Heck that Iranian officials predicted unruly colonels would likely overthrow the new Daoud government as well, casting much doubt on the fledgling republic.[319] This was something the Shah's advisor on Afghanistan had also told British

[316] DNSA, AF00035, Cable from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, 'Iranian Reaction to the Coup', July 1973.
[317] Ibid.
[318] FRUS, 1969-1972, E-7, Country Policy Statement on Afghanistan, Department of State, 6/8/1969, Doc. 326; DNSA, AF00007, Airgram from the Embassy in Afghanistan to the Department of State, 'United States Mission in Afghanistan: 1972 Policy Review, Report of the Kandahar Conference April 21-24, 1972', 24/4/1972; DNSA, AF00109, Cable from Department of State to Embassies in Pakistan, United Kingdom, Nepal, USSR, India, Iran, 'Republic of Afghanistan: Prospects', 26/7/1973; DNSA, AF00130, Cable Embassy in USSR to Department of State, August 1973.
[319] DNSA, AF00103, Cable from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, 'Iran-Afghan Relations', 25/7/1973.

officials.[320] This glimpse into an Iranian official's advice to the Americans on the situation in Afghanistan is important considering it came directly from the man closest to the Shah and likely on his orders. It is clear in the documentary record that American officials not only admit they did not know much about the events surrounding the coup or the people involved, but often deferred to or sought to predict the Shah's or other Iranian officials' views on matters regarding Afghanistan.[321] Lack of American awareness about Afghanistan's key political figures, history, and culture was a key factor in Iran's ability to step into a role as the trusted informant.

Perhaps most importantly, Iran's handling of the coup included several examples of the Shah to continue to lobby the Americans about the Afghanistan issue for Iran's material and political benefit. During an advantageously timed state visit to the United States, it was the Shah's prerogative to ensure that Nixon and other high-level American officials agreed with his point of view and supported Iran's regional role in dealing with the new crisis in Afghanistan. In several memoranda of conversations that took place during his visit directly between the Shah and President Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Nixon's Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, the Shah stressed what the coup in Afghanistan meant for the region and how important it was that the Soviets not gain a regional foothold through an unstable Afghanistan. Most revealing was the Shah's conversation with President Nixon in the Oval Office on the morning of July 24, 1973, just a week after the coup occurred. The conversation opened with both the Shah and President Nixon in agreement that the Soviets were the main threat to the Middle East and South Asia. The discussion quickly turned to Afghanistan as the Shah told Nixon that even if the Soviets were not behind the coup, they must have known about it, saying, 'The Soviets' strategy has succeeded in Afghanistan… Then they will push to the Indian Ocean. It is the same problem in Iraq. You are helpful in Iraq.' He said that the Soviets picked

[320] FCO 37/1224, *Folio 30: Tehran to SAD*, 2/10/1973.
[321] DNSA, AF00012, Cable from Embassy in Afghanistan Department of State, 'Afghan Coup: Initial Assessment', July 1973; DNSA, AF00035, Cable from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, 'Iranian Reaction to the Coup', July 1973; DNSA, Briefing Paper, Department of State, 'Republic of Afghanistan', 20/7/1973; DNSA, AF00109, Cable from Department of State to Embassies in Pakistan, United Kingdom, Nepal, USSR, India, Iran, 'Republic of Afghanistan: Prospects', 26/7/1973.

Afghanistan to exert their influence 'because the Afghans were becoming truly neutral' and had refused to participate in a Soviet-sponsored Asian security conference. The Shah said he was sure that the Afghans had proclaimed a republic knowing that it would portray a leftist coloration as a signal to the Soviets. He continued, 'If they push Pushtoon agitation, we know they will try for the Indian Ocean. Is this to isolate China or crush [Iran]? The objective may be both. We have recognized Afghanistan in order to remove any pretext for Soviet action.' The Shah expressed that maintaining the integrity of Pakistan's border areas would be essential to avoid crisis in the region, and that Afghanistan would play a key role in this. The Shah said Iran would support Pakistan against disintegration, including potentially arming them, and that Iran would need an expanded navy and air deterrent to keep the peace in the region. President Nixon's response was to agree with the points the Shah made, assuring him by saying, 'It has been very helpful to get your survey of the [regional] situation. Your analysis convinces me that it is indispensable that we have a policy of total cooperation. I want Dr. Kissinger to follow through on naval forces, breeder reactors, etc. I see the world and the part Iran plays pretty much as you do.'[322]

That same day, a similar stance was echoed by Henry Kissinger's interactions with the Shah. Again, the Shah primarily discussed the Afghan coup and the connection to Soviet intentions for Pakistan and the region:

> We shall have to look closely at the new situation in Afghanistan. We shall see if the Soviets push their advantage there. That will be a significant sign of whether they are actively pursuing a policy of isolating Iran and…whether they try to tell the Afghans that they can move only with Soviet assent.

He then finished by saying that it was a shame that the coup had succeeded because the Afghans had been recently trying to form ties with the non-Communist world. Kissinger then appeared to take up the Shah's call to action, assuring him that he planned to discuss this issue specifically with Ambassador Dobrynin, Soviet Ambassador to the United States:

[322] FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XXVII, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington (Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and President Nixon), 24/7/1973. Doc. 25.

> I will let him know that we would not be indifferent [to Soviet incursion in Afghanistan]. I raised the subject the other day…I said that if it were purely a local affair, then it would not be a U.S. concern. I recognize that it is a serious Pakistani concern. I shall be more explicit in my next conversation [and] if he says anything significant, I will inform you.

And indeed, Kissinger kept good on his promise to the Shah just a few days later. Following up, he told the Shah that he had spoken again to Dobrynin to apply some 'diplomatic pressure,' saying bluntly, 'I told Ambassador Dobrynin the other day that an outward thrust by the new government in Afghanistan would not be a subject of indifference to us. I told him it would be inconsistent with the principles that we have established as the basis for the U.S.-Soviet relationship.' He also asked in this context that the Shah keep him and President Nixon informed about any developments on the situation in Afghanistan, and that they would 'strengthen Iran to help Pakistan'.[323] In response, the Shah said that he had also warned the Russians about this, and that he 'could not close [his] eyes to active Afghan-Soviet pressures in Pashtunistan'. The Shah stressed, 'We have to watch both the Afghan and the Pakistani borders. I got one report that the Afghans were sending troops toward their border. I am not sure how President Daoud will develop.' The Shah had now not only obtained significant American respect for his opinion on regional matters but was also reaping the benefits of the full force of the Nixon administration's diplomatic might against the Soviets. Politically, the threat of the coup and an unstable Afghanistan paid off for the Shah, with Kissinger concluding that 'Iran should be the pillar of [the] Middle East policy.'[324]

However, the Shah was also intent on pushing his case for the material power to back up this more prominent political stance in the region. While this started well before the Afghan coup, the Shah's meetings with American defence officials after the coup secured Iran even more materiel for its growing arsenal.[325] During the

[323] FRUS, Vol XXVII, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 27/7/1973, Doc. 30.
[324] FRUS, Vol XXVII, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 23/7/1973, Doc. 24.
[325] In late February 1973, the Shah had purchased more than $2 billion in military equipment, largely of his choosing, from the United States due to Iran's surge in wealth from oil revenues. This transaction was the largest single arms deal that the Pentagon had ever arranged. See *New York Times*, 'Iran Will Buy $2 Billion in U.S. Arms Over the Next Several Years', 21/2/1973.

Shah's meeting with Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger during the same trip to Washington, the Shah's focused on how best to 'protect' Iran given its newly unstable neighbour to its east. Again, the Shah emphasised the Soviet threat in Afghanistan to as a means to get what he wanted, telling Secretary Schlesinger that there was a 'distinct possibility' of Soviet interference in Afghanistan in order to attain a military presence in the Indian Ocean and that this would be 'at the expense of Pakistan'. He also said that considering the recent instability, he 'firmly believe[d]' that Iran must have enough air power in the form of new aircraft (F-14s, F-15s and A-10s) to best deter his enemies or even, if needed, carry out pre-emptive strikes on their territory.

Additionally, the Shah explained that it would be necessary in the 'immediate future' for Iran to establish an even more powerful navy with a strong presence in the Indian Ocean if Iran is to 'be a viable power within the region and assume the proper responsibilities of a country having Iran's capabilities'. It is clear that the Shah wanted to guarantee Iran's defensive capabilities but also project military strength in the region to afford Iran the type of power for which he felt it was suited. When Schlesinger inquired further about the need for so much air power, the Shah countered that a stronger air force was needed to 'sweep from border to border' with the ability to 'liquidate' the local problems while the great powers sort out the larger regional issues at hand, and that Iran would of course be sure to not 'misuse' its military forces. Going back to Afghanistan, the Shah reiterated again that the Americans should realize that the coup was especially concerning. Because Afghanistan was now a 'republic' rather than another monarchy and because Daoud had seemingly little if any real control of the country, he argued that Afghanistan was vulnerable at any moment for Soviet control in their plans to move through Pakistan to get to the Indian Ocean. The Shah argued that Iran must have military capabilities strong enough to destroy the Iraqis, with known Soviet connections, and 'any other Russian puppet regime' within the region. The Shah finished the conversation by attempting to convince Schlesinger that because of Iran's uniquely strong capabilities when compared to other regional countries, that it must 'assume its responsibilities in the world in much the same manner as has been done by the United States' although

he understood that Iran could not have a 'military machine overnight'.[326] In this explicit statement of how the Shah sees Iran's role in the world, as much like that of one of the world's greatest powers, it is clear what the Shah's larger foreign policy aims are in connection with gaining not only political but also military prowess in his region as separate from his American benefactor.

In a second meeting with Secretary Schlesinger just two days later, the Shah received confirmation from the Americans that they took seriously the threats facing Iran and the greater South Asian region and that they would support Iran in taking the lead to manage these threats in whatever way necessary. To make his case, the Shah stated outright that Iran, by commencing a build-up of arms to prevent Soviet incursion in Afghanistan and by maintaining a productive and stable country, was in fact 'doing a positive service to Europe, Japan and the U.S', making it plain that what was occurring in Iran was in the interest of these parties. He noted that even the Russians call Iran the 'self-appointed gendarme of the Persian Gulf' saying, 'Why not?', and that Iran was not opposed in theory to sharing the responsibility of securing the region with others but that they were not yet ready. Secretary Schlesinger responded favourably to the Shah's statements, replying that he and his colleagues 'entirely shared' the Shah's views. He went on to say that the U.S. government can only applaud Iran's willingness and ability to take necessary action in the region, and in reference to whether this could provoke a pressure from the Soviets, he said that the U.S. must examine the steps it can take to help Iran withstand this pressure. On this note, he promised the Shah that the Department of Defense was prepared to provide Iran with military equipment but also technical assistance, which would include the training of Iran's forces and force analysis to ensure that Iran could counter any type of Soviet or regional threat. The Shah thanked the Secretary and noted that this would be particularly helpful with the new situation in Afghanistan.[327]

American compliance in providing what amounted to a blank check for military assistance as well as their political arrangement with Iran during this time put

[326] FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XXVII, Iran; Iraq, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington (Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Secretary of Defense Schlesinger) 24/7/1973, Doc. 26.
[327] FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XXVII, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, (Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Secretary of Defense Schlesinger), 26/7/1973, Doc. 29.

Iran in an extremely powerful position to manage great power presence in their region, even despite some American officials catching on that the Shah may have been exaggerating the Soviet threat in Afghanistan in order to procure more American arms.[328] And yet, Nixon and Kissinger's approach to Iran during this period is best summarized by Alvandi as he quotes the Shah bragging to Alam that Nixon 'gave me everything I asked for'.[329] Therefore, Iran's response to the Afghan coup took a two-pronged approach, first was to display an alarmist reaction to the coup to show that political instability in Afghanistan was a valid security threat to Iran and the Americans in that it could leave Iran and the region vulnerable; second was to also impart to the superpowers that Iran's knowledge of Afghanistan and ability to manage any regional crisis positioned it well to take the lead with key aspects of U.S. support. Having obtained official U.S. political and military backing for Iran's plans to take a leading stance in the region, as well as the word of the Americans to help Iran ward off any Soviet pressure, nothing held the Shah back from enacting new, post-coup policies towards Afghanistan that would work to Iran's benefit by aiding its regional goals.

[328] In a briefing paper for a trip Kissinger took to the Middle East in November of 1973, it describes the Shah as interested in using 'his "special relationship" with the U.S. as a means of ensuring preferred access to U.S. weapons with which he intends to establish Iranian pre-eminence in the region. Concerned that détente [with the Soviets] may lower U.S. receptivity to Iranian requests for support...[the Shah] continues to warn against Soviet encirclement…he foresees for Iran a broader and more independent role in the world.' See, NARA, AAD, Cable 220121 from Department of State to Embassy in Jordan, Embassy in Egypt, Embassy in Pakistan, Embassy in Iran, 8/11/1973.
[329] Asadollah Alam, *Yad'dashtha-yi 'Alam: virayish va muqaddamah-i mashruhi dar barah-i Shah va Alam az Ali Naqi Alikhani* [The Alam Diaries: Edited by Alinaghi Alikhani], Vol. II: 1970, 1972 (Bethesda, 1993), p. 260, as quoted in Alvandi (2012), p. 370.

Iranian Foreign Policy toward the Afghan Republic: 1973-1978

> The Afghans are casting about for friends; clearly they can't rely on Pakistan, still less on the Russians. Many factors incline them towards closer relations with Iran, but they are greedy….Even if we accept this and set about building up confidence, it will be but the first step on a very long road. We shall have to grant them credit facilities, assist their development programme downstream along the Hirmand River, and grant them access to our ports. We must also co-operate in matters of security if we are to transform them from a potential rival into a dependant of Iran.
>
> Assadollah Alam, March 17, 1969[330]

Amid growing tensions between Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan after the Afghan Coup of 1973, Iran had secured itself a leading position in the region, backed by its American ally, that would enable it to take a more offensive stance on regional affairs. Preoccupied with major concerns of Soviet encirclement and weak neighbouring states, Afghanistan had become a central part of Iran's foreign policy considerations due to her growing dependence on the USSR.

This section will discuss how after the coup, the Shah began to enact a policy to harness greater control over Afghanistan, which he saw as key to maintaining Iran's recent gains in regional stature. It will be demonstrated in the discussion of the Shah's motivations behind his policy toward Afghanistan that Iranian-Afghan relations were a significant element of Iran's larger foreign policy aim of asserting regional leadership in competition with the great powers present in the region. Using evidence from Iran's handling of the two most important policy issues in the Iranian-Afghan relationship during this period—the Pashtunistan issue and Iran's economic ties to Afghanistan—it will be argued here that the Shah sought to bring the Daoud regime to heel in order to influence Afghanistan's foreign policy toward the Soviet Union and Pakistan. In so doing, the Shah intentionally made Afghanistan more dependent on Iran, less dependent on the Soviet Union, and less hostile toward Pakistan, in order to realise an increase in Iranian regional primacy and the opportunity to expand his control over, and decrease Soviet and American presence

[330] Alam, *Shah and I,* p. 41. 'Hirmand' is the name the Iranians use for the Helmand River.

in, the Indian Ocean. By first employing a policy of intimidation toward Daoud's regime, despite the urgings of the Shah's western partners, and then strategically shifting to rapprochement, Iran projected enough power over, and subsequently cultivated enough leverage against, Afghan officials to influence Afghan foreign policy to Iran's advantage.

Pashtunistan, Baluchistan, and Dominating Daoud

Iran's handling of the Pashtunistan and Baluchistan issue[331] directly after the coup of 1973 is one of the clearest examples of the Shah's overarching Afghan policy during this period. As he had done with the Americans, the Shah used Pashtunistan as leverage against the Afghans as a way to achieve Iran's regional foreign policy objectives. This manifested in the domination of Daoud Khan until he capitulated to the Shah's desired direction for Afghan foreign policy on Pashtunistan, and eventually toward the USSR and Pakistan, for which the Shah rewarded him with rapprochement and the security and economic benefits therewith. As mentioned, the Afghan stance on the independence of Pashtun and Baluchi tribes in Iran and Pakistan with ethnic ties to Afghanistan was one of the major irritants in the Iranian-Afghan and the Afghan-Pakistani relationships. This was not only because of the potential internal security risks for Iran and Pakistan caused by separatist Pashtun and Baluchi tribes but also because the Shah was convinced this was the main vulnerability in the region that the Soviets could exploit to encircle Iran and establish themselves in the Indian Ocean. Daoud's initial stance on Pashtunistan, the Shah's strategic alignment with Pakistan and the military and covert activity he used to pressure Daoud on the issue, and the Shah's eventual success in bringing Daoud to reverse course despite the risk of serious domestic consequences will be explained to illustrate how the Shah manipulated the Afghans into changing their main foreign policy stance for Iran's regional benefit and what it secured for Iran in terms of its wider objectives.

[331] For ease of use, the issue (versus the two geographical locations) will hereafter be referred to as 'Pashtunistan' only; seen throughout this section, Pashtunistan and Baluchistan were often conflated into one issue by the Iranians, Pakistanis, and Afghans.

With established Soviet influence in India and Afghanistan, the Shah looked to Pakistan, another Western-allied state, to assist in his mission of rebuffing Soviet encroachment. Daoud's initially antagonistic stance on Pashtunistan and public references to the poor state of Afghan-Pakistani relations only served to exacerbate Iran and Pakistan's concerns of Soviet influence over Daoud's foreign policy agenda.[332] This caused both the Shah and Bhutto to begin a policy (from late July 1973 to January 1974) of aggression toward the Afghan regime in order to change Daoud's position on these crucial issues. This began with the Shah doubling down on his previously stated position to protect Pakistan from disintegration at all costs[333] and overtly align with Bhutto against Afghanistan. By ganging up on Daoud until he relented by easing his Pashtunistan position, the Shah and Bhutto sought to prevent any attempt by the Soviets to take advantage of an independent, or Afghan-controlled Pashtunistan and Baluchistan.

Many events detail the Shah's alignment with Pakistan, with whom the Afghans began to have increasingly poor relations. This began as early as the discussions around recognizing Daoud's regime directly after the coup. While Iran showed more restraint than they would in the following months, recognition catalysed the Iranian-Pakistani alignment. Bhutto and the Shah expressed their desire to strategize together over recognizing Daoud's government, with Pakistan specifically asking the United States to wait for Iran and Pakistan's deliberations before the Americans recognized Afghanistan. The Americans heeded this request and indeed only recognized the Afghan regime once the Shah had given the green light.[334]

Iranian-Pakistani coordination on a tough line on Pashtunistan quickly followed. During a meeting with Henry Kissinger, the Shah said that he had met with Bhutto in London on July 23 to discuss whether Pakistan would hold bilateral talks

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[332] DNSA, AF00109, Cable from Department of State to Embassies in Pakistan, United Kingdom, Nepal, USSR, India, Iran, 'Republic of Afghanistan: Prospects', 26/7/1973.
[333] DNSA, AF00150, Biographic Report, Central Reference Service, Central Intelligence Agency and Department of State, 'Mohammad Daoud, President of Afghanistan', August 1973.
[334] NARA, AAD, Cable 143877 from Department of State to Embassy in Afghanistan, Embassy in Iran, et al, 'Relations with Afghan Regime', 21/7/1973; NARA, AAD, Cable 143949 from Department of State to Embassy in Afghanistan, Embassy in Iran, et al, 'Relations with Afghan Regime,' 21/7/1973.

with Afghanistan on Pashtunistan. The Shah told Kissinger that while talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan could be and had been held before, he explained:

> Bhutto is not prepared to accept any monkey business. He said he would knock on the Afghan heads if necessary. But if we make it clear to [Afghanistan] that we are not going to accept any monkey business, they will think twice before doing anything foolish. As I explained…just the power [Iran has] of being able to knock out Soviet protégés will make them think twice.[335]

This exchange indicates that Iran and Pakistan never intended on a diplomatic approach toward Afghanistan early in Daoud's regime, something borne out by the events that followed.

After about a month in office, Daoud finally wrested control of his government. With no successful counter-coup attempts, Daoud found himself in a position to tackle Afghanistan's major foreign policy issues, including its relationships with neighbours, the Americans, and the Soviets. In the first public statement on foreign policy on August 19, 1973, notably on Afghan Independence Day, Daoud said that Afghanistan would 'pursue a policy of nonalignment and peaceful coexistence with neighbors and respect for the UN charter.' Daoud placed an emphasis on 'good neighborly ties,' hoping to build upon recently improving relations with Afghanistan's Iranian 'brothers.' However, despite the olive branch to Iran, he asserted that the Afghan-Soviet relationship was 'unfalterable' and, crucially, that '*Pakistan is the only country with which Afghans have differences*.'[336] To the Shah and Bhutto's distaste, Daoud had also gone to the Americans and Soviets for help in dealing with the Pashtunistan issue with Pakistan, admitting that he would have to pursue it as a matter of Afghan foreign policy due to pressures of internal unrest domestically if he did not.[337] Even though Daoud had effectively forewarned the interested parties of the domestic reasons for pushing Pashtunistan, the Shah's

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[335] When Kissinger asked the Shah if he was referring to Iraq as a Soviet protégé, the Shah said, 'All countries who lean on them for support.' FRUS, Vol XXVII, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, (Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Henry Kissinger), 24/7/1973, Doc. 27.
[336] Italics added for emphasis. DNSA, AF00162, Cable from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, 'President Daoud Outlines New Government Policy', August 1973.
[337] NARA, AAD, Cable 164400 from Department of State to Embassy in Pakistan, Embassy in Iran, et al, 'Afghan Relations with Neighbors,' 17/8/1973.

subsequent actions show that he saw Daoud's pursuit of the issue as Afghan aggression against Pakistan and felt it was encouraged by the Soviets. Not only would Iran not assist Afghanistan with the Pashtunistan issue, they would take Pakistan's side.

Thus, as the Shah expected, Daoud's hard line on Pashtunistan and related events quickly began to exacerbate the regional situation, and the Shah felt increasingly threatened by the possibility of Afghan and Soviet encroachment on Iran through Pashtun or Baluchi incitement. One key reason for this, as Alam recalls in his memoir on August 18, 1973, was that the Afghans had sent a warning to Pakistan through the Iranian Embassy in Kabul (of all places), stating the Afghans could 'no longer turn a blind eye to the sufferings of Baluchis living on the Pakistan side of the border.' Alam described this move as 'increasingly aggressive' and the Shah as 'extremely anxious' about it. He quotes the Shah's reaction as 'I can detect the hand of the Soviets and maybe that of India behind this ultimatum'. This incident led Alam to suggest to the Shah, 'Why don't we place ourselves in a position of strength before negotiating with [the Afghans]; meet force with force?' to which the Shah replied, 'There seems much to be gained from the action you propose', ordering Alam to draft a plan.[338] According to the Shah's account to the British and the Americans, the note had crossed another red line for Iran in that it conflated the 'national aspirations' of the Baluchis with the Pashtuns, which left the Iranians furiously asking 'since when had the Afghans become the champion of the Baluchis?'[339] A few days later, Alam told the Shah that the Afghans had infiltrated the Baluchi population in Pakistan, which was particularly concerning because Iran was in the midst of tackling Baluchi guerrillas in Iranian Baluchistan that they thought had come from Soviet-supported Iraq. Alam stressed to the Shah 'once we've mopped up our own problems with the guerrillas we need to teach the Afghans a lesson they won't forget.' When the Shah asked whether that would incite Soviet support for Afghanistan, Alam argued that

[338] Alam, *Shah and I,* p. 309-10.
[339] NARA, AAD, Cable 05846 from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, Embassy in Pakistan, Embassy in Afghanistan, et al, 'Iranian Reaction to Afghan Note', 20/8/1973; FCO 37/1224, Folio 29: FCO Internal Memorandum, 'Lord Carrington's Visit to Iran: Afghanistan', 26/9/1973. To no avail, British officials insisted that they had guarantees from the Afghan deputy foreign minister that they did not include Iranian territory in Pashtunistan.

Iran should no longer wait to see whether their enemies would make a move but instead go on the offensive.[340] While these threats seemed very real to the Iranians, the Americans chalked up the Afghan note as a risky Afghan 'diplomatic bluff' to counter Iran and Pakistan's political alignment and 'achieve what they [could not] hope to achieve at this time by more direct methods.'[341] The Shah continued to express outrage that Afghan officials were stating explicitly that Baluchistan was 'simply an extension of the Pashtunistan problem.'[342]

American officials had aptly deduced from the start that a warming of Iran-Pakistan relations would likely be viewed in Afghanistan as an 'effort to secure further Iranian hegemony in the region.'[343] They were concerned that such a move would backfire, causing Daoud to act irrationally and seek out a foreign adventure should problems worsen. As such, the Americans consistently counselled Iran and Pakistan to avoid in undertaking any 'alarmist' action or talk about Afghanistan, even if it was justifiable, and made considerable efforts to encourage close Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.[344]

However, the Shah expressly ignored American overtures, despite previously securing considerable material and political support from the United States by leveraging the Afghanistan issue. By August 1973, the Shah had escalated his alignment with Bhutto, exercising policies that further isolated Daoud. President Bhutto told U.S. Senator Charles Percy that month that Iranian-Pakistani relations could not be better and they had begun to work very closely together on issues of mutual concern, like Afghanistan.[345] Iran proceeded to host several meetings for high-level Pakistani officials in Tehran from the period after the coup until early

[340] Alam, *Shah and I,* pp. 310-11.
[341] NARA, AAD, Cable 204207 from Department of State to Embassy in Nepal, Embassy in Sri Lanka, et al, 'Afghan-Pak-Iranian Relations', 15/10/1973.
[342] NARA, AAD, Cable 06501 from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, Embassy in Kuwait, Embassy in Saudi Arabia, et al, 'Audience with the Shah', 13/9/1973.
[343] DNSA, AF00109, Cable from Department of State to Embassies in Pakistan, United Kingdom, Nepal, USSR, India, Iran, 'Republic of Afghanistan: Prospects', 26/7/1973.
[344] Ibid; DNSA, AF00142, Cable from Department of State to Embassy in Afghanistan, U.S. Mission Geneva, 'Relations with Daoud Government', 7/8/1973.
[345] DNSA, AF00154, Cable from Embassy in Pakistan to Department of State, Aug 1973.

1974, especially at the peak of Iran-Pakistan alignment in October 1973.[346] At least one of these was a meeting between the Shah, Alam, and Bhutto during the latter's mid-October visit to Iran, during which they strategized over the Pashtunistan issue.[347]

There are indications that the Afghans started to feel pressured through early media reporting of the Shah and Bhutto's cooperation, as there were many reports of the meetings taking place between the Shah and Bhutto on Afghanistan. These were made all the worse with media propaganda that the Afghans accused their neighbours of deliberately disseminating from both Iran and Pakistan. Iranian radio broadcasts allegedly reported a slew of negative stories and unconfirmed 'facts' about the Afghan coup, which Afghan leadership saw as 'unfriendly' and damaging to the legitimacy of the new republic. Reports included assertions that the coup was more leftist than it appeared, that King Zahir Shah would return to Afghanistan, and that some of his generals had been killed in the coup.[348] These broadcasts had also been picked up by international outlets: the BBC speculated that the Shah and Bhutto would meet in order to plan what could be done with 'unruly Afghanistan'.[349] News about the Iran-Pakistan alignment had reached the Afghan public, as evidenced by an American cable that reported Afghan soldiers discussing Iran-Pakistan talks and their wariness of the development of 'secret treaties' between President Bhutto and the Shah.[350] The Americans lamented in a cable on 'Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations' that 'obvious signs of close Iranian-Pakistani coordination on a tough Pakistani

[346] NARA, AAD, Cable 07326 from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, Embassy in Afghanistan, Embassy in Pakistan, 'Visit of Prime Minister Bhutto', 17/10/1973; NARA, AAD, Cable 07281 from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, Embassy in Pakistan, 'Bhutto Visit to Iran', 15/10/1973; NARA, AAD, Cable 07096 from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, Embassy in Pakistan, 'Pirzada Stop in Tehran', 8/10/1973.
[347] NARA, AAD, Cable 07326 from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, Embassy in Afghanistan, Embassy in Pakistan, 'Visit of Prime Minister Bhutto', 17/10/1973; Alam, p. 327.
[348] DNSA, AF00035, Cable from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, 'Iranian Reaction to the Coup', July 1973; DNSA, AF00079, Cable from Embassy in Iran to Embassy in Afghanistan, 'Report of Zahir Shah's Return', 21/7/1973; DNSA, Briefing Paper, Department of State, 'Republic of Afghanistan', 20/7/1973; DNSA, AF00047, Cable from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, 'New Regime's concern with neighbors', 7/1973.
[349] Ibid.
[350] DNSA, Briefing Paper, Department of State, 'Republic of Afghanistan', 20/7/1973.

diplomatic line' has caused Daoud to want to review his foreign policy, as Afghanistan was beginning to feel 'in great danger from its neighbors.'[351]

In addition to political alignment with Pakistan, the Shah undertook a series of aggressive military and covert actions against Afghanistan to bring Daoud to heel. This began with his ordering military operations in both Iranian and Pakistani Baluchistan. From the start, the Shah had sent a very clear message in response to Daoud's ultimatum about Baluchi suffering by adamantly ordering Alam on August 19 to 'act quickly' to quash Baluchi unrest in Iranian Baluchistan, calling the situation 'totally unacceptable.' The Shah tasked Alam to personally oversee the capture and killing of Baluchi insurgents, which he did in coordination with SAVAK[352] and pro-Shah Baluchi tribal leaders (whom Alam later rewarded with cars).[353] The Shah also began directly fighting Afghan involvement in Pakistan's Baluchi and Pashtun areas. By the end of September 1973, the Afghans complained to their American counterparts that they had become 'greatly concerned over Iranian military activity in [Pakistani] Baluchistan,' specifically the fact that there were Iranian Air Force helicopters in Baluchistan. They had also been seeing press reports from Soviet-allied India claiming that 'Iran was calling the tune in Baluchistan and was determined to block any autonomy there'.[354] The Shah confirmed their existence to then-American Ambassador Richard Helms, stating plainly that the purpose for sending aircraft was to assist Pakistan with troubles in Baluchistan.[355] Alam's account corroborates this, and importantly, confirms their purpose was an intentional show of strength to the Afghans and Indians.[356] When asked by the British ambassador in Tehran whether Iran's helicopters in Baluchistan were there for military purposes or aid purposes, Alam said 'that it was both; that [Iran] had no

[351] NARA, AAD, Cable 204207 from Department of State to Embassy in Nepal, Embassy in Sri Lanka, et al, 'Afghan-Pak-Iranian Relations', 15/10/1973.
[352] SAVAK is the acronym for *Sazamane Etelaat Va Amniate Kechvar* (Iranian Security and Intelligence Service), Iran's intelligence service under the Shah's reign.
[353] Alam, pp. 310-12, 316-17.
[354] NARA, AAD, Cable 11318 from Embassy in India to Department of State, Embassy in Afghanistan, Embassy in Pakistan, Embassy in Iran, 'Main Visit to Delhi', 26/9/1973.
[355] NARA, AAD, Cable 05838 from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, Embassy in Pakistan, Embassy in Afghanistan, 'Iranian Air Force Helicopters Operating in Baluchistan', 18/8/1973.
[356] Alam, *Shah and I,* p. 320.

alternative but to…prevent the disintegration of Pakistan.' Additionally, the Shah clarified that Iran meant it to be a deliberate display:

> In the case of Pakistan, our helicopters are flying under Iranian insignia, and the pilots have been ordered to wear Iranian uniforms…we have nothing to hide. Our intervention is at the request of Pakistan and aimed solely at defending her integrity. We have ensured that the rest of the world has been notified of this, especially the Indians.[357]

Highlighting the connection of these plans with the Shah's obsession with Soviet designs, when the BBC reported in December 1973 that Baluchi rebels in Pakistan were being crushed using the Shah's helicopters, funds, and troops, inspiring resentment among the Baluchi and Pashtun people, the Shah suspected Soviet meddling. In a shocking display of paranoia, the Shah asked Alam, 'You don't suppose it might possibly have anything to do with the British Foreign Secretary's recent visit to Moscow?'[358]

The Shah's blatant exhibition of growing armaments and military hostility toward the Afghans on the Iran-Afghanistan and Afghanistan-Pakistan borders continued to escalate tensions. In a meeting with U.S. Embassy Kabul officials, Daoud accused the Shah of being the shadowy figure behind Bhutto's recent movements to secure contested areas on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.[359] The record ascribes some truth to his claims. As mentioned, the Shah had used the security threat of the Afghan coup and Soviet encroachment as justification for requesting more military hardware from the Americans, which they granted. In fact, the Shah said explicitly that the reason he needed more military equipment was because while the security situation to his 'west [was] unchanged and still threatening…the coup in Afghanistan [would] force him to provide a deterrent force in that area as well,' which would require covering his eastern border with fighter aircraft.[360] A few weeks later, the Shah had already tasked General Toufanian, his

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[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid, p. 340.
[359] DNSA, AF00164, Cable from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, 'Evaluation of Daoud's Government and Comments on Pashtunistan Policy', August 1973.
[360] FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XXVII, Iran; Iraq, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington (Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Secretary of Defense Schlesinger) 24/7/1973, Doc. 26.

Deputy Minister of War, to expedite Iranian air defences along its border with Afghanistan. He wanted this to include an evaluation of Iran's radar capability from the entire span of the country from Mashhad to the Gulf as well as the capability of airfields in area to service air-defence aircraft if needed. The Americans commented that the Shah had done this because concerns about 'alleged Soviet provision of the latest model flight aircraft to Afghanistan [were] apparently heightened since the Daoud takeover.'[361]

The record describes amplified paranoia on all sides of the Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan borders about military movements by neighbours: in the absence of proper diplomatic relations between Iran and Afghanistan, the Afghans consistently complained to and sought assistance from the Americans about Iranian and Pakistani aggression in hopes to 'somewhat "even the odds"'.[362] Some of Iran's escalation was due to reports the Shah received about the Afghans concentrating armour on Iran's border. When the Americans told the Shah that the Afghans had accused Iran of doing the same, he said that 'an Afghan might have seen an Iranian bulldozer and had misidentified it'.[363] Considering the imbalance of military might weighing heavily in Iran's favour, and the Afghans insistence that they wanted to avoid military confrontation with their neighbours, it is unlikely Afghanistan initiated military aggression toward the Iranians.[364] In October of 1973, Daoud claimed to the U.S. chargé d'affaires in Kabul that the recent Iranian and Pakistani military build-up had

[361] DNSA, AF00112, Cable from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, 'Soviet Arms for Afghanistan', 26/7/1973. However, in later documents, the Americans confirmed that the Afghans had not actually received new aircraft from the Soviets since 1968 and that there had been no Soviet push for military modernization in Afghanistan in the early months after the coup. See: NARA, AAD, Cable 05591 from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, Embassy in USSR, et al, 'Soviet Arms for Afghanistan', 18/7/1973.
[362] NARA, AAD, Cable 204207 from Department of State to Embassy in Nepal, Embassy in Sri Lanka, et al, 'Afghan-Pak-Iranian Relations', 15/10/1973.
[363] FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XXVII, Iran; Iraq, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, (Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Secretary of Defense Schlesinger), 26/7/1973, Doc. 29; FRUS, Vol XXVII, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, (Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Henry Kissinger), 27/7/1973, Doc. 30.
[364] DNSA, AF00167, Cable from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, 'Daoud Government After Six Months - An Assessment', January 1974; NARA, AAD, Cable 204207 from Department of State to Embassy in Nepal, Embassy in Sri Lanka, et al, 'Afghan-Pak-Iranian Relations', 15/10/1973.

been strategically planned in that it began 'many months ago.[365] The Afghans said they saw on their border that Iran was 'erecting a military machine far greater than would be necessary to defend it from…Afghanistan,' with American officials noting that the 'Afghans traditionally fear[ed] an expansionist Iran.'[366] These tensions escalated into a small border incident in late October, during which Iranian gendarmerie killed five Afghan tribesmen that had undertaken an armed raid across a disputed area near the border.[367] Around this time, Daoud assessed the balance of power in the region as 'highly unfavorable for Afghanistan' in the context that he believed both Iran and Pakistan had 'grand designs' that they were pursuing to the detriment of Afghanistan.[368]

Perhaps the most important contributor to Daoud's intimidation during this period were the Shah's covert schemes to subvert Daoud's government. Sources indicate that two major factors pushed the Shah's to undertake such policies: first, Afghanistan's stance on Pashtunistan, and second, Iran's concern that Daoud would quickly be overthrown by the Soviet-sponsored army officers who brought him to power, which would yield even more dire circumstances in Afghanistan.[369] Alam's memoirs detail a several-year Iranian strategy, which began as a plot to overthrow Daoud's regime, and later evolved as a series of hedges to install a future regime more greatly indebted to Iran. The main instances of this include the Shah's financial support of several former Afghan royals that could be used to conduct counter-coups.[370] According to Alam, the day the Afghans delivered their late-August 'ultimatum' on the Pashtuns and Baluchis, Alam suggested, 'Why doesn't your Majesty allow me to raise Western Afghanistan against the regime in Kabul? It could be done quite easily, and at the moment we hold every trump in the pack; the King of Afghanistan will be behind us.' The Shah replied that the King was 'incapable of

[365] NARA, AAD, Cable 07332 from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, Embassy in Iran, Embassy in Pakistan, et al, 'Meeting with President Daoud', 16/10/1973.
[366] DNSA, AF00167, Cable from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, 'Daoud Government After Six Months - An Assessment', January 1974.
[367] FCO 37/1224, *Folio 32: Tehran to FCO*, 1/11/1973.
[368] NARA, AAD, Cable 07332 from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, Embassy in Iran, Embassy in Pakistan, et al, 'Meeting with President Daoud', 16/10/1973.
[369] Alam, *Shah and I,* pp. 305, 310-312; FCO 37/1224, Folio 30: Tehran to SAD, 2/10/1973; FCO 37/1420, Folio 2: Tehran to MED, 7/2/1974.
[370] Alam, *Shah and I,* pp. 311, 318, 480.

decisive action' but to 'have a plan of action prepared for submission as soon as possible.' The plan the Shah approved on August 22 was to provide financial support to the former Afghan king, Zahir Shah (still in exile in Rome). Alam proposed: 'once the King feels indebted toward us, he might well change his mind about returning to Afghanistan' to initiate a counter-coup in the western provinces, where the Iranians held considerable influence.[371] To the great irritation of the Shah and Alam, just days later Zahir Shah announced his abdication and support for Daoud, which Alam lamented was Iran's fault for leaving Zahir Shah stranded in Rome.[372] Interestingly, the Iranian meddling did not stop at this stage. After months of increasing funding to Zahir Shah and his family, in November 1973, the Shah authorized giving the king a $10,000 per month allowance from the government's 'secret funds', and insisted only the Iranian Ambassador to Rome and Alam were to know about it.[373]

Additionally, after Zahir Shah had abdicated, the Shah enquired on September 4 about the possibility of supporting Iran's long-time Afghan ally Abdul Vali Khan, as an option for ruling Afghanistan.[374] An Afghan general who was Zahir Shah's son-in-law, Abdul Vali Khan had been arrested by Daoud Khan during the coup for his role helping the former government advocate closer ties with Iran at the expense of Afghanistan's national interests.[375] When the Shah asked Alam whether he thought Abdul Vali could escape Afghanistan, Alam says it would be very difficult considering he was imprisoned more or less next door to Daoud Khan's residence. Alam suggested to the Shah that if Iran could not risk sending a rescue team to extract Abdul Vali that they could bribe his jailers.[376] Despite these complications, the Shah's continued support of the King and his children (Abdul Vali was married to the King's daughter Belquis), show the seriousness with which he took this plan. Even as late as spring 1976, the Shah told Alam, 'Remember what I told Nelson

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[371] Ibid, p. 311.
[372] Ibid, p. 312.
[373] When Zahir Shah told the Iranians that if Daoud agreed to pay him a salary, he would no longer need Iranian money, the Shah's response was to increase his allowance. Ibid, p. 322, 326
[374] Ibid, p. 314. Abdul Vali Khan was an Afghan royal with which the Shah prioritized cultivating ties at least as early as September 1970. See Alam, *Shah and I,* p. 168 and FCO 37/1009, *Folio 16: Cable from Islamabad to FCO*, 21/6/1972 and *Folio 28: Tehran to MED*, 26/7/1972.
[375] NARA, AAD, Cable 204207 from Department of State to Embassy in Nepal, Embassy in Sri Lanka, et al, 'Afghan-Pak-Iranian Relations', 15/10/1973.
[376] Alam, *Shah and I,* p. 314.

Rockefeller, [Vice President under President Ford]…one day we may install Abdul Vali Khan as the new ruler of Afghanistan.'[377]

According to Alam, Daoud was aware that the Shah was supporting the former Afghan royal family to some extent.[378] Additionally, a high-level Afghan official, whose name remains classified, even expressed such concerns to American officials, enquiring directly whether the Americans knew if it Iran and Pakistan's intention to intervene in order to place Zahir Shah back on the throne. The Americans took the stance that the Iranians or Pakistanis' actions would 'depend on their perceptions of whether or not there had been other foreign involvement in the coup.' The Afghan's response was to stress that he was sure there was no foreign involvement in the coup, but he did not provide evidence of this.[379] The exchange shows that the Afghans were well aware that the Iranians, as justification for intervention or involvement in Afghan affairs, told the Americans that there was Soviet involvement in the coup and that it would have negative consequences for regional security. These Iranian accusations are something the Soviets were also aware of, but they told the Americans they should not give credence to Iranian theories.[380]

Lastly, scholar Selig Harrison provides a convincing narrative about Iranian covert intelligence activity in Afghanistan during this period:

> Among the less visible, subterranean aspects of the Shah's offensive was expanded activity by his intelligence agency, Savak, which attempted to challenge the well-established KGB [presence in Afghanistan]. Covert operatives…filtered into the Afghan capital during the years after 1973.[381]

During Harrison's time in Kabul and Tehran in 1977, he interviewed then-Prime Minister Fereydoun Hoveyda about SAVAK's operational activity in Afghanistan,

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[377] Ibid, pp. 323, 326, 336, 368, 480.
[378] The Afghan ambassador to Iran gave Alam a note in which Daoud thanked the Shah for denying reports that Zahir Shah's daughter, Princess Belquis, had been staying in Tehran at Iran's invitation (even though she was there), meaning he was obviously aware that Iran had contact with the former Afghan royal family and likely under what circumstances. Alam, *Shah and I,* p. 325.
[379] DNSA, AF00070, Cable from Secretary of State, Department of State to Embassy in Afghanistan, 'Afghan Coup – Interest', 20/7/1973.
[380] DNSA, AF00130, Cable Embassy in USSR to Department of State, August 1973.
[381] Cordovez, Diego and Harrison, Selig. *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal,* (Oxford:1995), p. 16.

and he 'pointed to it proudly as an example of Iranian-American cooperation.' According to Hoveyda and other American and Pakistani officials involved, SAVAK and the CIA worked in close coordination to collaborate with 'underground Islamic fundamentalist groups that shared their anti-Soviet objectives.' SAVAK specifically 'hired informers who attempted to identify Communist sympathizers throughout the Afghan government and armed forces.' They also channelled American 'weapons, communications equipment, and other paramilitary aid to anti-Daoud groups,' some of which was given to tribal dissidents in the western provinces directly by Iran, and some went through underground fundamentalist networks in Pakistan. According to Harrison, the CIA and SAVAK were also behind several 'abortive, fundamentalist-backed coup attempts against Daoud in September and December of 1973 and June 1974.'[382]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, of the many declassified CIA documents detailing the events of this period, there are none available that describe CIA-SAVAK collaboration in Afghanistan. However, a *New York Times* article from July 1978 that discusses such coordination can be found in the CIA's online archive with a handwritten note that says, 'file.'[383] There is also an active discussion in the British record in 1976 about SAVAK presence at the Iranian Embassy in Kabul, including frustrations around the 'alarmist reports' the Shah was getting from them on the extent of Soviet penetration in Afghanistan. The British also reported on the Shah beginning to cast doubt on 'reliance…placed on nationalism and religion as barriers against Communist control' in Afghanistan, perhaps a reference to the groups he had been supporting against Daoud.[384] The Americans also alluded to this in October 1973, in a State Department Cable to regional embassies that Afghan distrust of the Iranian ambassador in Afghanistan was 'not unwarranted.'[385] Additionally, several conversations between Alam and the Afghan ambassador to Iran from late 1973 and throughout 1974, show the former's persistence in attempting to glean information

[382] Ibid.
[383] CIA, 'U.S.-Iran Links Still Strong,' 9/7/1978 (article within *New York Times*, 'U.S.-Iran Links Still Strong,' 9/7/1978.)
[384] FCO 37/1689, *Folio 8: Tehran to SAD*, 1/12/1976 and *Folio 9: SAD to MED*, 6/12/1976.
[385] NARA, AAD, Cable 204207 from Department of State to Embassy in Nepal, Embassy in Sri Lanka, et al, 'Afghan-Pak-Iranian Relations', 15/10/1973; FCO 37/1689, Folio 2.

about communist infiltration in and Daoud's level of control over the Afghan Army.[386] Daoud's comments in the record make clear that he held a strong suspicion that Iran was engaged in this type of interference into Afghanistan's internal affairs. He explicitly said in late 1973 and early 1974 that Iran likely had a hand in recent counter-coup attempts against his government.[387]

The sum of these Iranian tactics had a disastrous effect on Iranian-Afghan relations and succeeded in their intended effect of showing Daoud that the Shah was in control of the region. By October 1973, Iran and Pakistan's behaviour had Daoud so concerned that the Americans described him as 'exhibit[ing an] obsessive preoccupation with perceived military threats from Pakistan and Iran…[and] with the overriding necessity to achieve an "honorable solution" to the Pashtunistan Issue.'[388] As the consequences for Daoud's Pashtunistan stance became increasingly unbearable for the Afghans, they continually sought to deescalate the situation and engage with the Iranians diplomatically. As early as August 25, Iran's foreign minister told the Shah that Prince Mohammad Naim, Daoud's brother and closest advisor,[389] wished to visit Iran to discuss the Pashtunistan and Baluchistan situations. However, as this was early after the coup, the Shah refused any sort of diplomatic relations with the Afghans. He retorted, 'Tell him he can go to hell…he can't ride roughshod over me in the way he did with Pakistan.' According to Alam, in late September, the Afghans tried again, sending a message through the British charges d'affaires in Kabul that they felt Iran's concerns over Soviet influence in Afghanistan were 'groundless' and that they were 'as keen as ever' to have friendly relations with Iran. The Afghans had, demonstrating their desire for rapprochement, selected Daoud's son-in-law Mohammad Ghazi as the ambassador to Iran and had his wife, Daoud's daughter, attend official engagements alongside Daoud in Kabul. However,

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[386] Alam, *Shah and I,* pp. 340, 375, 402.
[387] DNSA, AF00167, Cable from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, 'Daoud Government After Six Months - An Assessment', January 1974; NARA, AAD, Cable 06996 from Embassy in Iran to Department of State, Embassy in London, Embassy in Pakistan, etc., 'Audience with Shah', 2/10/1973.
[388] NARA, AAD, Cable 204207 from Department of State to Embassy in Nepal, Embassy in Sri Lanka, et al, 'Afghan-Pak-Iranian Relations', 15/10/1973.
[389] Iranian media reported Naim's title as Special Representative to the Afghan Head of State. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS) FBIS-MEA-74-091, p. R1, 7/5/1974.

as mentioned, none of this succeeded in deterring the Shah from providing overt military support for Pakistan against a possible Afghan-backed Pashtun or Baluchi insurgency, nor the other measures he took against Daoud's regime.[390]

Seeing this strategic turning point in the Afghan resolve on Pashtunistan, the Iranians began to test the waters for possible engagement with the Afghans at the end of 1973, a process that resembled dangling a meaty bone for a ravenous dog. In late November, Daoud's ambassador came to present his credentials in Tehran. Given the previous months' political and military intimidation against the Afghans, it is no surprise that Alam describes, in his first meeting with the ambassador on December 4, that Ghazi 'required little prompting to open up about recent events in his country.' Ghazi readily admitted that Daoud's government was sending money to King Zahir Shah in Rome, which Alam said he already knew. He was also forthcoming with unknowingly touchy information (for the Iranians) about how he himself had helped convince the King to abdicate and how scornful he was of Abdul Vali Khan. In the first signal of its kind, Alam told the ambassador 'how keen [the Shah was] to support Davoud; should Davoud fall the whole of Afghanistan might be plunged into chaos.' He also asked directly afterwards to what extent the Afghan army was under control. Alam received no clear answer about the latter, but his message had the intended effect: 'presumably the ambassador believed [Alam was] spellbound by Davoud, since he left looking thoroughly pleased with himself'.[391]

The Afghan position on Pashtunistan was beginning to show signs of improvement just weeks later. Alam told British officials in mid-December that the Afghans had begun tempering their attitude on Pashtunistan, evidenced by the moderation of the Afghan press coverage and the decreased frequency of anti-Pakistan propaganda. In justifying Iran's dramatic shift in position toward the Afghans, Alam said that it suddenly 'did not seem sure that the Afghans were looking for a fight. They seemed still too preoccupied in sorting out their own domestic confusions'.[392]

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[390] Alam, *Shah and I,* p. 312, 319-20.
[391] Ibid, p. 336, 339-40.
[392] FCO 37/1224, Folio 34: Tehran to MED, 13/12/1973.

The major shift came when the Afghans made the first move: sending Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Wahid Abdollah to visit Tehran in late January 1974. This was an important step, as Abdollah was the first senior official to visit Tehran since the coup. The level of engagement was clear at the outset: the Shah on holiday in Switzerland, and Abdollah was received and held meetings with his counterparts, the Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Ali Khalatbari, and Prime Minister Amir-Abbas Hoveyda. Iranian Foreign Ministry officials concluded that Abdollah had warily visited 'to obtain first-hand confirmation of Iran's good intentions towards Afghanistan, and [the Iranians] believed that Abdollah had been favourably impressed.' However, the Iranians said that while they were now less concerned about Daoud, Naim and their associates, the real question was whether the young officers may still overthrow them. A British Foreign Office official, more optimistic, responded to the visit by noting, 'this move by Afghanistan to improve their relations with Iran is to be welcomed.'[393]

Events precipitating further Iranian-Afghan discussion on Pashtunistan and general rapprochement continued quickly thereafter. With no direct communication established between the Shah and Daoud, the Afghan president used the Indian media to communicate with the Shah. During an interview with notorious Indian journalist R.K. Karanjia in April 1974, Karanjia told the Shah that he had been the first correspondent to interview Daoud, and when Karanjia asked him about Iran, Daoud had 'voice[d] the best sentiments toward Iran, and, in general, he expressed Afghanistan's readiness to cooperate with Iran.' Seemingly taken aback, the Shah replied, 'When did this interview take place? Karanjia said, 'November 1973…we were discussing his problems in the face of Pakistan,' and continued that Daoud told him as far as Iran was concerned, there were no 'unsolvable problems whatsoever.' The Shah's reply, showing the shift toward rapprochement, was 'This is, in fact, true.' However, unable to pass up an opportunity, the Shah also expressed his frustration about Afghanistan's inability to come to terms with Iran on certain bilateral issues like the Helmand waters while dangling the potential for Iranian-Afghan cooperation on economic issues, like the possibility Afghanistan could make

[393] FCO 37/1420, Folio 34: Tehran to MED, 7/2/1974.

use of Iran's ports.[394] Indeed, this ploy worked: when Daoud was interviewed by another Indian journalist months later, he said that he had carefully considered the Shah's words in the Karanjia interview.[395]

Also noteworthy was that Abdollah, who had previously been virulent in his anti-Iran and anti-Pakistan stance,[396] began to shift his tone on Pashtunistan in the months that followed. In an interview with an American journalist in July, Abdollah insisted that, despite Pakistan's recent claims, there was no concentration of Afghan forces or movement of troops that were a threat to Pakistan, and that war would not take place between Afghanistan and Pakistan 'because the Afghan leaders have complete knowledge of and correctly appraise the situation in the region in which they live.'[397] Additionally Abdollah made the unusual move of briefing multiple regional countries' ambassadors and chargés to Kabul (including Iran's) on July 14 about the falsehood of Pakistani claims that the Afghans were making military preparations against Pakistan.[398]

As if to make absolutely certain that the Iranians knew where the Afghans stood, three days later, President Daoud issued his first public statement urging close ties to Iran. Importantly, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Afghan republic, Daoud spoke directly to the Shah and the Iranian people through Iranian correspondents:

> The bonds of friendship and fraternity between our two nations have existed throughout history. I hope that these friendly and fraternal sentiments between the two neighboring and fraternal peoples will grow, for they would be in the interest of the two countries, people and the region in which we live. I hope that these sentiments will remain firm eternally. May I send through the Iranian National Radio and Television our gratitude, my own and those of the government of the people of Afghanistan, to His Imperial Majesty Shahanshah and our Iranian brothers and friends.[399]

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[394] FBIS-MEA-74-066, pp. R1-5, 2/4/1974.
[395] FBIS-MEA-74-225, pp. S2-3, 19/11/1974.
[396] NSA, AF00164, Cable from Embassy in Afghanistan to Department of State, 'Evaluation of Daoud's Government and Comments on Pashtunistan Policy', August 1973.
[397] FBIS-MEA-74-139, p. S1, 15/7/1974.
[398] FBIS-MEA-74-142, p. S1, 15/7/1974.
[399] FBIS-MEA-74-139, p. S2, 17/7/1974.

Discussed in the following section, the growing economic-aid relationship between Iran and Afghanistan played an important role in accelerating Afghan moderation on Pashtunistan. However, it is significant that the Afghans began to shift on the issue and actively sought rapprochement with Iran before Iran's economic aid and friendship were firmly on the table. The Shah had succeeded, using pressure tactics that were against the advice of allies, in manipulating Daoud's regime to a more favourable position toward Iran and on the policy issue that was most important to the Shah's peace on mind: the Soviet push toward the Indian Ocean and Pakistan's possible disintegration. Daoud's willingness to bend on Pashtunistan and adopt a less hostile stance toward Pakistan was the signal the Shah needed to pursue a return to the status of relations cultivated with Zahir Shah before the Afghan coup. However, the goal of rapprochement was not to benefit from friendlier interactions; rather—as Alam described in 1969—it was to reinitiate a process of making Afghanistan dependent upon Iran and no one else.[400]

Iranian-Afghan Rapprochement: Economic Aid and the Indian Ocean Cooperative

Once a delicate rapprochement with Daoud's government had been initiated, and security issues surrounding Pashtunistan had been clarified, Iran began a policy of intensive economic investment in Afghanistan. Discussed earlier in this chapter, Daoud's overthrow of Zahir Shah had potentially disastrous consequences for Iran's regional economic strategy: Iranian officials had laboured, and succeeded, during Zahir Shah's last years on the throne to reach a settlement on the Helmand Waters dispute, one of the only remaining impediments to connecting Afghanistan to a planned, Iranian-led Indian Ocean trade cooperative centred at Bandar Abbas.[401] Because the Helmand Waters agreement had yet to be fully ratified by the Afghan parliament before the coup—and many of the coups organisers had used Zahir Shah's approval of the agreement as a rallying point (against selling Afghanistan out to

[400] Alam, *Shah and I,* p. 41.
[401] FCO 37/1224, *Folio 10: Kabul to SAD,* 21/2/1973; FCO 37/1224, *Folio 3: Kabul to SAD*, 29/1/1973; FCO 37/1224, *Folio 14: Cable from Tehran to FCO*, 15/3/1973.

Iran)—Daoud did not appear likely to sign it.[402] Indeed, this was the case for the majority of his tenure. However, Iranian officials made clear that they were less concerned about the approval of the agreement itself: Iran had and could continue taking whatever amount of water from the Helmand it desired. It was more about the strategic importance of having Afghanistan on side for Iran to achieve its larger regional goals.[403] It is thus even more revealing that the Shah prioritised pressuring Daoud on Pashtunistan before he considering exploring rapprochement with Afghanistan.

By July 1974, as the previous section details, Daoud had clearly indicated that he was ready to end the tension that had defined his early relationship with the Iranians. The Shah rewarded him, over the next few years, by vastly increasing its economic aid to and financial investments in Afghanistan. This began with the signing of a massive, bilateral economic agreement in July 1974, which scoped a potential $2 billion Iranian investment in development-project assistance and other economic aid.[404] According to Iranian officials that discussed it openly, including Iranian Minister of Commerce Hushang Ansary, Iran's ability to finance what the CIA termed as 'the Shah's lending binge' was the fourfold increase in the price of oil (from 1973-1974) and Iran's extensive commerce with the United States.[405] This section will describe Iran's motivations and actions in pursuing this policy, and what it achieved for Iran in line with its regional and international goals. It will be argued that Iran's prioritisation of providing economic aid to Afghanistan during this period was to achieve what was just out of Iran's reach before the coup: first, to dampen Soviet regional hegemony by shifting Afghanistan from Russia's sphere of influence

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[402] According to Mahmoud Foroughi in January 1974 (the Shah's former ambassador to Afghanistan but continuing advisor), a story circulated in Afghanistan that when the coup organisers arrested Zahir Shah's former prime minister that had finalised the Helmand Waters deal with Iran (Musa Shafiq), they shaved his head in prison without water 'since he had given all of Afghanistan's water to the Iranians.' See, FCO 37/1420, *Folio 1: Tehran to MED,* 14/1/1974; FCO 37/1224, *Folio 29: 'Lord Carrington's Visit to Iran: Afghanistan',* 26/9/1973*;* FCO 37/1224, *Folio 30: Tehran to SAD*, 2/10/1973; FCO 37/1224, *Folio 33: Tehran to SAD,* 8/11/1973.
[403] FCO 37/1224, *Folio 33: Tehran to SAD,* 8/11/1973.
[404] CIA, The President's Daily Brief, 'Iran-Afghanistan,' 1/8/1974.
[405] According to the *New York Times,* this would increase the Shah's revenues by $16-18 billion in 1974 alone. See, *New York Times,* 'Shah of Shahs, Shah of Dreams,' 26/5/1974. FCO 37/1420, *Folio 11: Tehran to Mr. Westmacott, House of Commons*, 6/11/1974; CIA, 'Iran: The Shah's Lending Binge,' Intelligence Memorandum, 12/1974. FBIS-MEA-75-044, p. R2, 4/3/1975. pg. 39

into Iran's through greater economic dependence; and second, to secure Afghanistan's support of, and assent for its role in, an Iranian-led Indian Ocean cooperative. As with before the coup, Iran's regional economic plan was indeed interconnected to and inseparable from Shah's desire to limit Soviet (and to some extent American) presence in the Indian Ocean and access to regional trade routes that Iran wanted to control; the only difference for Iran in 1974 was that they had more money to make it a reality.[406]

It is important to note here that because of the high-profile nature of Iran's large economic deals with Afghanistan, other scholars (and some media articles) have paid more attention to this particular aspect of Iranian-Afghan relations than other issues covered in this dissertation. For example, both Hyman and Harrison refer to the economic aid, with Harrison observing Iranian's desire to replace Russia as Afghanistan's largest aid donor.[407] However, neither scholar provide the context for Iranian decision-making over whether to provide such massive economic assistance to Afghanistan, nor do they explain the events that took place for it to come to fruition. These motivations and actions, and the theoretical and conceptual underpinning, are unique to this work.

The most bypassed aspect of Iran's large economic investment in Afghanistan during this period is the acknowledgement of Iran's moves to fund trade-related infrastructure projects in Afghanistan to link the country to Iran's existing transit facilities as part the latter's wider plans for an Indian Ocean economic and security cooperative.[408] Mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Shah was heavily invested in his plan for the Iranian-led Indian Ocean cooperative. As Alam noted about the development of the industrial port at Chabahar (less than 450 miles to the Afghan border): 'We've invested hundreds of millions of dollars developing the port, Iran's

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[406] Just before the coup, British officials at Embassy Tehran noted, 'The main motive is that the Shah hopes by rapprochement to give Afghanistan another option besides the Soviet Union. We know the Shah has no illusions Iran could ever be a substitute to the USSR but she could offer some alternative. Nevertheless, he believes that over the years Iran will increase her ability to deter even the USSR from adventures [in the region].' See, FCO 37/1224, Folio 21: Tehran to MED, 3/5/1973.

[407] Hyman, *Afghanistan,* pp. 49-50; Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan,* p. 16.

[408] While Harrison nods to the Shah's efforts beginning in 1974 to 'draw Afghanistan into a Western-tilted, Teheran-centered regional economic and security sphere embracing India, Pakistan, and the Persian Gulf states.' He does not explain how and fails to fully establish Iran's objectives as separate from those of their American partners.

gateway to the Indian Ocean.'[409] The Shah's moves to include Afghanistan in his vision for the Indian Ocean began slowly in line with his building rapprochement with Daoud and his advisors. Iranian officials began by dangling possible economic aid to Afghanistan. In February 1974 when the Afghans sent a trade delegation to Iran to renew a routine trade agreement, the trip ended in discussions around Afghanistan's openness to accepting increased Iranian investment. While Iranian officials played down the interaction's importance to their allies, Iran's press reported the signing of this agreement with Afghanistan as 'an expansion of trade ties.'[410] In April 1974, the Shah initiated a key turning point in the same interview with Indian journalist R.K. Karanjia that was discussed in the previous section. Signalling to Daoud, when asked if Iran would allow Afghanistan to use its ports, the Shah said:

> We have already offered to place such facilities at their disposal. We have been talking with them about this highway for more than 10 years now. In addition to this highway, our railroad will be extended from Bandar Abbas to Kerman….[and] from Kerman to Zahedan, which is close to the Afghan border. We have built a highway linking Bandar Abbas to Kerman. We might later build a highway from Iranian Baluchistan to the Afghan border. We will expand Chahbahar port. This port will first become a huge military base. However, commercial vessels will of course visit the port also….Thus [the Afghans] could use two ports and two highways. One of the ports would be in the Persian Gulf and the other would be on the Oman Sea. They can use our highways and to a great extent our railroads. If they wish we can place all transit facilities at their disposal through our railroad network…to the Mediterranean….They can also gain access to the Caspian Sea. They can use this sea and the waterways with which it is linked to any point in Europe.[411]

After the lengthy sales pitch, Karanjia asked the Shah pointedly whether he had made a recent proposal to Daoud. The Shah at first evaded, then hit back, 'They must be very preoccupied with their internal affairs….We can be a great help to Afghanistan.'[412] Daoud acknowledged in November that year that he saw the

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[409] Chabahar was an important alternative to Bandar Abbas for Indian Ocean access due to its location in southeastern Iran, on the coast where the Gulf of Oman meets the Indian Ocean. See, Alam, p. 419.
[410] FBIS-MEA-74-035, p. K3, 20/2/1974; FCO 37/1420, Folio 3: Tehran to MED, 26/2/1974.
[411] It is unlikely a coincidence that the Shah laid out his entire proposal for shifting Afghanistan into his sphere of influence to a publication in Soviet-allied India. FBIS-MEA-74-066, p. R1-5, 4/4/1974.
[412] It is unlikely a coincidence that the Shah laid out his entire proposal for shifting Afghanistan into his sphere of influence to a publication in Soviet-allied India. FBIS-MEA-74-066, p. R1-5, 4/4/1974.

Karanjia interview and that he 'studied the proposals made by the Shah.'[413] This was clear when Daoud sent his closest advisor to Iran just one month later. Upon departing Iran in May, Naim told reporters that he had transmitted a message to the Shah from Daoud and that Afghanistan felt the Shah's proposals to use Iran's trade routes were 'extremely important' and would be of 'great assistance.'[414]

It is perhaps no surprise that after Daoud's message of friendship to the Shah in July 1974, rapprochement moved precipitously, especially in the economic arena. A high-level Iranian economic delegation was sent to Kabul for this purpose in late July. The delegation, led by the Iranian Minister of Commerce Fereydun Mehdavi, was a resounding success that resulted in the signing of the $2 billion[415] economic agreement discussed above. Significantly, the agreement included a protocol for multiple joint projects in Afghanistan, which were: extensive Helmand River basin development projects such as a dam, hydroelectric plant, and agricultural projects; the building of large complexes for the sugar- and meat-production industries; the establishment of an import-export bank; cooperation in a study of Afghanistan's railway network; building a highway to the Iranian border; and providing Afghanistan with 200 buses for better transportation.[416]

Obvious from the protocol, all of these projects were related to the expansion of Iran's regional trade network through Afghanistan by connecting the country to Iran's ports and transit routes to the Gulf and the Indian Ocean. As Harrison points out, Iran had succeeded in achieving its own goals by generating a 'co-prosperity sphere' with the Afghans.[417] However, Harrison gives misplaced credit to American encouragement as the reason for the Shah's aid to Afghanistan.[418]

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[413] FBIS-MEA-74-225, p. S2-3, 19/11/1974.
[414] FBIS-MEA-74-094, p. R1, 14/5/1974.
[415] While the deal had the potential for up to $2billion in Iranian investment, only $20 million was initially disbursed to fund 'feasibility studies' for the projects detailed in the protocol. The rest of the funds were to come from a later agreement discussed below. See, FCO, 37/1420, *Folio 7, Cable from Kabul to Routine FCO*, 3/9/1974.
[416] FBIS-MEA-74-174, p. S1, 23/7/1974; FBIS-MEA-74-149, p. S1, 28/7/1974.
[417] Harrison, p. 16.
[418] Kissinger himself makes the Shah's autonomy clear in a memorandum to President Ford. Additionally, the Shah's insistence on leading his own Afghan policy, and ignoring American advice, is visible in the execution of the Shah's Pashtunistan policy. See, FRUS, Volume XXVII, Doc 77, 'Memorandum From Secretary of State Kissinger to President Ford,' 6/9/1974.

The signing of the July 1974 economic deal, as Afghan press later emphasised, laid the groundwork for increased economic assistance established by another large economic pact signed in late April 1975 that provided a large portion ($700 million) of the $2 billion in Iran's promised funds for Afghanistan. This deal came as a result of Daoud's first state visit to Iran, in late April 1975, which underlined the nations' undeniable shift from their previously hostile relations. The agreement formalised Iran's development of the lower Helmand River region and its extension to the Iranian border, including the necessary railway lines and highways.[419]

However, it quickly became clear that Iran would extract concessions from Daoud for opening Afghanistan up to the international market through Iran's transit facilities. During Daoud's speech during his state dinner at the Shah's court, he thanked Iran for their generous economic assistance while saying that Afghanistan was working toward finding an honourable solution to its issues with Pakistan.[420] Harrison also observed that Iran's economic aid began to have a bearing on Daoud's Pashtunistan stance, stating that in November 1975, Daoud 'began to retreat in the sensitive nationalist issues of Helmand Waters and Pushtunistan,' culminating in Daoud (and Bhutto's) state visits to each other's countries and agreeing publicly to find a peaceful solution to the Pashtunistan issue.[421] And finally, and likely most importantly to the Shah, immediately after Daoud's state visit, he publicly voiced his support for the Shah's proposals on the Indian Ocean Cooperative.[422]

Conclusion

This chapter covers a period of Iranian history in which its economic, political, and military power reached a zenith, making it an interesting period to determine Iran's unhampered foreign policy motivations and actions. During the height of the Cold

[419] FBIS-MEA-75-086, p. R4, 1/5/1975.
[420] Ibid.
[421] Harrison explains: 'In response to overt Pakistani pressure, [Daoud] served notice that Afghanistan would no longer be a haven for Pushtun and Baluch insurgents fighting against the Pakistani regime of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. While refusing to oust more than ten thousand tribesmen who were already using Afghanistan as a base for gueilla operations, he outraged nationalist elements by denying entry to new refugees fleeing from the Pakistan Army.' See, Harrison, p. 17.
[422] FBIS-MEA-75-086, p. R4, 1/5/1975.

War, and given Iran's historical distrust of the Soviet Union, Mohammad Reza Shah chose to align Iran with the United States and benefitted from a massive American investment which led to substantial Iranian oil wealth, the amassing of a military arsenal, and the enabling of Iran as a political proxy for a superpower. One part of Iran's ability to achieve these things was the leveraging of America's fears around Soviet expansionism and communist penetration in a region vital to American economic and national security interests. Part of the way the Shah did this was through his alarmism around the growing Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and suggesting and undertaking an Iranian and American foreign policy response to that problem.

After the Afghan Coup of 1973, perceived by the West and the Iranians as Soviet-backed, Iran used the power it had gained in the preceding years to develop political, economic, and military dominance over Afghan leader Mohammad Daoud Khan until he succeeded in controlling the foreign policy of Afghanistan to benefit Iran. Key examples of this included Daoud's tilt away from the Soviet Union toward Iran and the United States, and Daoud's support for the Shah's proposed Iran-led regional economic cooperative. In this way, Iran's foreign policy toward Afghanistan was critical to Iran's persistent, and in this case successful, desire to attain regional dominance in competition with the great powers.

Chapter Four: Iran's 'Export of the Revolution' to Afghanistan, 1982-1987

Introduction

This chapter will argue that Iranian foreign policy toward Afghanistan during the 1980s was neither a force for stability in Afghanistan nor primarily driven by Islamic ideology (as is often argued in the post-revolution discourse).[423] Rather, this section will show a second historical example of the continuity of Iran's foreign policy toward Afghanistan based on a confluence of Iranian nationalism, in this iteration an *Islamic manifestation,*[424] and the same structural realities of great power regional domination. The Islamic Republic of Iran's (IRI) primary interest in its political and military position toward Afghanistan was to actively subvert the Afghan government, the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), by cultivating loyal clients amongst the Afghan resistance movement that could eventually play a role in representing Iran's interests in Afghanistan's national-level political system. The relationships and activities Iran pursued in Afghanistan after Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, similar to those prior to the revolution, provided Iran strategic inroads and levers for political, military, and cultural control or influence that furthered Iranian interests in and vis-à-vis Afghanistan. Iran's activities in Afghanistan during this period culminated in the eventual creation of the Iran-initiated 'Tehran Eight' in 1987, a coalition of Shi'a Afghan resistance organizations that became involved in national-level negotiations to decide Afghanistan's governance after the Soviet Occupation ended.

Despite the fact that the 1980s was a period during which Iran was threatened by great power presence on its borders and embroiled in the midst of what has been characterized as a 'total war' with Iraq, from 1982-1987 Iran undertook its largely covert campaign to consolidate control and influence over key aspects of Afghanistan's political, military, economic, and cultural environments. This assessment seeks to integrate, analyse, and expand upon the existing open-source

[423] See, Wilde, *Underestimated and Ignored,* p. 101; Milani, Mohsen. 'Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan,' Middle East Journal, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Spring, 2006), p. 235.
[424] Ansari, *Nationalism,* p. 1.

literature and provide a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of the extent of and motivations behind Iran's influence in Afghanistan and Iranian-Afghan relations than has previously been available. Even with significant political and economic limitations during the period of this case, the Islamic Republic demonstrated a prioritization of its Afghan policy as a means through which it could exert pressure on the great powers in the region and facilitate Iran's wider international foreign policy goals and regional stature.

First is detailing the political strategy the Islamic Republic undertook with the DRA directly and in multilateral engagements. Iran's creation of, and stubborn adherence to, an unrealistic 'proposal' for a political solution for Afghanistan (which no other regional state produced)—and its refusal to participate in the UN-sponsored Geneva process—demonstrate that Iran was never serious about finding a political solution for Afghanistan, only a military one. Second, in Iran's military strategy for Afghanistan, the domestic contextualization for the export of Iran's revolution to Afghanistan has been too little studied. As will be discussed, in disagreement with some scholar's arguments that internal factionalism amongst the political elite in Iran hampered the IRI's ability to influence Afghanistan, this work posits that Iran's state institutions actually created a systematised apparatus to bolster the Afghan resistance in both Iran and Afghanistan. The structure and effectiveness of that apparatus show a previously misunderstood level of coordination and agreement within the state, as well as Khomeini's consolidation of state power, that progressed the pursuit of a common Afghanistan strategy. Third is a re-examination of the extent of and motivations behind the IRI's material support for certain parties inside Afghanistan and what that support achieved for Iran.

Background

As discussed in the previous chapter, Iran's agenda for Afghanistan cannot be separated from Iran's broader foreign policy goals for regional leadership and countering the superpowers that had a presence in the region. Iran's quest for regional leadership both before and after the revolution is a well-documented phenomenon, especially during the latter period, when it was engrained in Iran's revolutionary

ideology as the 'export of the revolution.' When Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini came to power and installed an Islamic republic in Iran, a key tenant of that republic was to export the ideals of the revolution and establish Ayatollah Khomeini as the *velayat-e faqih*, the highest authority in Shi'a Islam. Khomeini's path to regional leadership was to inspire all Muslims to seek an Islamic government as part of a united Muslim community, which Khomeini himself would lead. Khomeini's movement fit into a trend of pan-Islamist movements that materialized as a reaction to the predominance of secular dictatorships in the period before the late 1970s.

Throughout the pre- and post-revolutionary period, the main threat to Iran's success in achieving its desired regional role was not only a contest with Iran's wealthy Gulf Arab neighbours, but also the threat posed by secular American and Marxist Russian presence in the region. This became more pronounced after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 with two key issues: the Iranian Hostage Crisis of 1979-1981, when Iran deepened its rejection of relations with the United States, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, viewed by Iran and others in the region as a violation of a regional nation's sovereignty and a territorial security threat. With the Soviets in Afghanistan and rising American presence in the Gulf to counter Soviet expansionism, the wider goal of Iranian foreign policy toward Afghanistan was to ensure Afghanistan served as a check and a buffer against great-power presence in the region as well as a lever through which Iran hoped to extract concessions from both the Soviets and the United States. Iran exploited that lever through its strategic pursuit of an interventionist policy toward Afghanistan in which it obtained a substantial influence over the Afghan resistance parties that controlled central Afghanistan and a significant part of western Afghanistan near Iran's border.

Developing Influence: Iran's Strategy in Afghanistan from 1979-1981

Shortly after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, IRI officials and Iranian clerics began developing pockets of influence in Afghanistan, building on historical ethno-linguistic and religious bonds, in hopes of directly and indirectly countering the increased Soviet presence in the region. The period leading up to 1982, when Iran began heavily influencing Afghanistan, saw several foundational steps take place to

eventually enable an environment in which Iran's greater influence in Afghanistan could be achieved. Namely, Iran's new Islamic government began strategically rejecting normal diplomatic relations with the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan run by the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), convinced that the coup that established it in 1978 was incited or planned by the Soviets.[425] Additionally, as will be explained, Iran's fledgling government, but mainly its clerics and their institutions, developed their own relations with and support for elements of Afghanistan's resistance groups, some of which had been engaged by Iran during the Shah's reign. These groups were primarily from areas of Iran's traditional influence, in western Afghanistan near the Iranian border amongst the Shi'a and Persian-speaking Tajik and Uzbek groups, and most notably, in the Hazarajat[426] amongst Afghanistan's Shi'a Hazara minority.

From early 1979 through late 1981, the Iranian support provided for both Sunni and (mainly) Shi'a anti-DRA resistance groups, hereafter the *mujahidin,*[427] included substantial political and limited material support. Iranian political support was overt, especially prior to the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980, and included rhetorical and tangible political support from IRI leaders and notable Iranian *ulema,* as well as the allowance of *mujahidin* political offices and activities on Iranian territory. Iranian material assistance to the *mujahidin* during this time was limited in scope and mostly came from conservative elements within Iranian society, particularly Iran's *ulema* and developing Revolutionary Guards (IRGC),[428] to a few, select *mujahidin* groups.[429] While some support began before the Soviet Invasion of

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[425] CIA, 'Iran: Views on Afghanistan', early 1980 (est.), p. 1.

[426] The Hazarajat is located in central Afghanistan and is considered to include the provinces of Bamiyan and parts of Ghazni, Oruzgan, Ghor, Jowzjan, Balkh, Samangan, Parwan, Daikundi, and Wardak. See: Olivier Roy. *Islam and Resistance*, (Cambridge: 1990), p. 239.

[427] *Mujahidin* is typically translated as 'warriors in the way of god.' See Bhatia, Michael and Sedra, Mark. *Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict: Armed Groups, Disarmament and Security in a Post-War Society,* (London, 2008) p. 73.

[428] The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is the armed force that was established by Ayatollah Khomeini, separate from Iran's traditional army, to preserve the Iranian Revolution's ideals and assist in exporting Iran's revolution outside of its borders. See, Alfoneh, Ali. *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guards Is Transforming Iran from Theocracy into Military Dictatorship*, (Washington: 2013) and Ostovar, Ashfon. *Vanguard of the Imam: Religion, Politics, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards.* (Oxford: 2016).

[429] CIA, 'Iran: Views on Afghanistan', early 1980 (est.), p. 3; CIA, 'Afghanistan: Iran's Role in the Crisis', July 1980, p. 1.

Afghanistan in late December 1979 as part of Iran's initial efforts to gain regional prominence through its revolutionary ideology, it intensified directly afterward as the Iranians became increasingly nervous about Soviet military movements on their borders.[430] Discussed subsequently in this chapter, vocal Iranian support and the perception and reality of Iranian material support for Afghan *mujahidin* created considerable rifts in the IRI's relationship with both the DRA and the Soviets during this period. Utilizing rhetoric and action, Iran was able to leverage the issue of supporting *mujahidin* to subvert the ruling party in Afghanistan, and indirectly combat that party's Soviet backer, which it felt threatened its physical security and its regional interests.

Early Political Support for the Afghan *Mujahidin*

Iranian political support for the Afghan *mujahidin* prior to 1982 was considerable and overt, especially in the period between the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the start of the Iran Iraq War, at which time Iran's foreign policy focus understandably shifted. The political support can generally be described as the rhetorical statements of IRI officials and leading Iranian clerics as well as more tangible political support to the Afghan *mujahidin* involving direct ties, propaganda assistance, and allowance of *mujahidin* activities and offices based in Iran.

Early after the Iranian Revolution, the rhetoric surrounding Iranian links to the Afghan resistance initially took the form of denials by IRI officials hoping to quash the DRA's accusations that such support was real and amounted to Iran's interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs. From March 1979 through September 1979, Deputy Prime Minister Abbas Amir-Entezam, Chief Justice Sadegh Khalkhali, Prime Minister Mehdi Barzagan, and Foreign Minister Ebrahim Yazdi all stated clearly that despite rumours to the contrary, Iran was not interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs by supporting the *mujahidin*.[431] However, at the same time, Iran's

[430] DIA, 'Iranian Support to the Afghan Resistance', July 11, 1985, p. 1; The Russian General Staff, Gran, L. W. and Cress, M. A (trans. and eds.), *The Soviet-Afghan War–How a Superpower Fought and Lost,* (Kansas City: 2002), p. xxiv.
[431] FBIS-MEA-79-054, 18 March 1979, R10; FBIS-MEA-79-107, 28 May 1979, R12; FBIS-MEA-79-079, 20 April 1979, R13; FBIS-MEA-79-179, 12 September 1979, R1; FBIS-MEA-79-194, 01 October 1979, R1.

clerical elite, including Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari and Grand Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri, were quick to voice their backing for the *mujahidin* as support for Iran's 'brother Muslims' in Afghanistan.[432]

Not surprisingly given Iran's historical concerns about Soviet encirclement, there was an uptick and intensification of pro-*mujahidin* rhetoric by Iranian government and religious leaders after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. This period saw Iran's Prime Minister Abolhassan Banisadr and Foreign Minister Sadegh Qotbzadeh as the most vocal advocates for support of the *mujahidin* against Soviet and DRA aggression in Afghanistan. While Banisadr told Iranian and foreign press just before the invasion that Iran could not do more to support the Afghan rebels due to the IRI's 'weak and non-existent' foreign policy, he also said Iran saw the *mujahidin*'s resistance against the DRA as justified since the regime was Soviet-backed and illegitimate to the Afghan people.[433] Amid subsequent threats to the DRA and the Soviets that Iran would support the *mujahidin* should the Soviets decide to stay in Afghanistan, Qotbzadeh and Banisadr told the press that no one should take Iran's 'exporting the revolution' as literal and that Iran did not intervene in other countries' affairs.[434] But in April 1980, Qotbzadeh confided in British officials that the IRI was strategizing about supporting the *mujahidin* because the IRI's leadership was certain that the USSR's real aim was to invade Iran or Pakistan.[435] Banisadr was quoted as saying not long after that '[Iran's] revolution will not win unless it is exported…As long as our brothers in Palestine, Afghanistan, the Philippines, and all over the world have not been liberated, we Iranians will not put down our arms. We give our hand to deprived people all over the world.'[436]

Iran's key religious leaders also voiced support for the Afghan resistance. In January 1980, Ali Khamenei, then-Imam of Tehran's Friday prayers, said to his congregation, 'We should strengthen our foreign policy…All the liberation movements organized by our Muslim brothers all over this region are not separate

[432] FBIS-MEA-79-053, 15 March 1979, R9; FBIS-MEA-79-191, 01 October 1979, R12.
[433] FBIS-MEA-79-224, 16 November 1979, R9.
[434] FBIS-MEA-80-060-S, 22 March 1980, 25.
[435] FCO, 8/3593, Folio 14, Cable from Tehran to Priority FCO, 7/4/1980.
[436] CIA, 'Iran: Exporting the Revolution', 2/4/80. p. 1.

from our own…We will taste real victory only when…our dear and oppressed Afghanistan is liberated.'[437] Around the same time, Ayatollah Khomeini said in a speech read out to hundreds of thousands of Iranians that Iran would grant its 'Afghan brothers' all the 'necessary aid' required, and in August 1980, he identified Afghanistan as the main problem for Muslims behind the liberation struggle in Palestine.[438] Additionally, Ayatollah Montazeri and Ayatollah Beheshti (Chief Justice after Khalkhali), both of whom were close to Ayatollah Khomeini at this time, were very vocal in calling on the region's Muslims to support the Afghan resistance.[439]

Described below, a careful analysis of American intelligence memoranda and Iranian and Afghan press during this period reveal substantial evidence that official and unofficial Iranian political support for the Afghan resistance in the early revolutionary period included direct ties with certain *mujahidin* parties, the allowance of these groups to operate and conduct their activities in Iran, and assistance with their freedom of movement across Iran's border with Afghanistan. The Iranian government and Iranian *ulema* had direct ties with both Shi'a and Sunni Afghan *mujahidin* in the early days of the Islamic Republic. Support for Shi'a *mujahidin* centred on establishing relations with Iran's core Shi'a allies in Afghanistan, many of whom were from western Afghanistan and the Hazarajat in central Afghanistan. These groups have been described as 'particularly active in the insurgency against the DRA's communist regime' with many 'look[ing] to [Iran's Ayatollah] Khomeini for leadership.'[440]

One such party was *Harakat-e Islami Afghanistan,* (Islamic Movement of Afghanistan)[441] a Shia, anti-Soviet resistance movement that combined several various smaller groups and had bases both inside and outside Afghanistan. Its leader, Asif Mohseni, was a Shi'a Hazara theologian who was a student of Khomeini during

[437] Khamenei also referred to liberation movements in Palestine, Eritrea, and the Philippines. FBIS-MEA-80-014-S, 18 January 1980, 25.
[438] FBIS-MEA-80-024-S, 4 February 1980, 30; FBIS-SAS-80-156, 09 August 1980, I12.
[439] FBIS-MEA-80-001-S, 31 December 1979, 17; FBIS-SAS-80-179, 11 September 1980, I3; FBIS-MEA-80-019-S, 25 January 1980, 7; FBIS-MEA-80-041-S, 27 February 1980, 20; FBIS-MEA-80-063-S, 29 March 1980, 1; FBIS-SAS-81-020, 29 January 1981, I11.
[440] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Iran's Role in the Crisis', July 1980, p. 2.
[441] Not to be confused with *Harakat-i Inqilab Islami*, the much larger Sunni resistance group, See: Ruben (2002).

the latter's years in exile in Iraq.[442] Mohseni founded *Harakat* in Qom, where he was allowed to operate by Iranian authorities and reportedly received support from the Iranian state. Some Iranian officials rejected the idea of IRI support for Mohseni because he was suspected of communicating with and getting support not only from the Americans but also from rival Sunni *mujahidin* groups based in Peshawar, which was seen as a betrayal of the Shi'a cause and as collusion with imperialists.[443] In August 1980, Iranian officials, from American documents they pieced together after the U.S. Embassy takeover, allegedly learned that the CIA had transferred money to Mohseni's bank account and *Harakat*'s offices in Iran were shuttered.[444] The Afghan press ran with this story as proof that Iran was supporting rebel groups and interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs using groups that were tied to 'imperialists.'[445] While some accounts suggest that Mohseni was a *persona non grata* to the IRI thereafter, ample evidence to suggest otherwise will be detailed later in this chapter.[446]

Another early relationship was established with Sadiqi Nili, a Shi'a Hazara who challenged the *Shura-e Inqiblab-e Ittifaq Islami Afghanistan* (Revolutionary Council for the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan, referred to hereafter as the Shura), which was an assembly of parties providing governance in the largely autonomous Hazarajat after that region's effective liberation from DRA control in June 1979.[447] Islamists like Nili felt the Shura was too secular, due to its leadership being controlled by Hazara *khans* (traditional tribal leaders) in alliance with moderate clerics. As such, Nili established his own *madrasa* (religious school) in his home district that provided religious teachings and served as a centre of political activities. Its purpose was to 'train a generation of motivated Islamists with a radical political ideology and religious worldview. As such, in 1971, he was designated as a representative of Ayatollah Khomeini in Afghanistan.'[448] His active undermining of

[442] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Iran's Role in the Crisis', p. 2.
[443] *The Guardian*, Nushin Arbabzadah, 'Afghanistan's Turbulent Cleric', 18 April 2009
[444] Barnett Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: 2002), p. 222.
[445] FBIS, 332, 340, 349
[446] One such example is Rubin (2002), p. 222.
[447] Niamatullah Ibrahimi,'The Failure of a Clerical Proto-State: Hazarajat, 1979-1984'*, London School of Economics Working Paper*, (September 2006), pp. 1, 6, 16.
[448] Ibid, p. 4, 6.

the Shura helped him to consolidate control over certain areas of the Hazarajat and implement his own Islamist reform agenda, prioritizing the redistribution of the khans' lands and properties to poor families.[449] Nili went on to become a main player in Afghanistan's *Nasr* party, known to have close ties with the Iranian government. While the extent of his activities in Iran before 1982 are unclear, *Nasr*'s offices and activities in Iran were reported by Iranian media as early as April 1979.[450] Barnett Rubin, Niamatullah Ibrahimi, and other scholars have acknowledged *Nasr*'s role as a significant force in shaping the Shi'a resistance and the politics of the Hazarajat.[451]

The Iranian government also developed relations with Sunni Afghan resistance groups in the late 1970s and early 1980s, showing the regime's initial openness to exporting Iran's revolution to Sunni Muslims based on other areas of commonality, be they ethnolinguistic, security, or fundamentalist Islamist leanings. A relationship began with the group *Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan* (hereafter *Jamiat*), which appealed to Iran for a number of reasons. For one, it leader Burhanuddin Rabbani was an educated, non-Pashtun, Persian-speaking Tajik, as were many in his party, which presented Iran an opportunity to relate to them on an ethnolinguistic level. Rabbani was also an Islamist that hated communism, though his party's version of Islamism was more moderate than other Afghan *mujahidin* groups.[452]

Information on Iran's early relationship with *Jamiat* and Rabbani is not abundantly available, but a careful analysis of Iranian and Afghan media show some important connections as early as the summer of 1979. On June 9, 1979, Rabbani told a French reporter that there had been some initial contacts between *Jamiat* and the IRI: 'We are hoping to establish cordial relations with [the Iranian government]. We have sent some of our envoys to Iran for this purpose. These envoys have met with some of the leaders and they will also meet with Khomeini.' It should be noted that Rabbani was also seeking support from Saudi Arabia, Iran's regional rival, to whom he made an appeal just days later.[453] In an attempt to woo Iran, Rabbani said several

[449] Ibid, p. 7.
[450] Ibid, p. 17; FBIS-MEA-79-082, 26/4/1979, p. R19; FBIS-MEA-79-083, 29/4/1979, p. R2.
[451] For more, see Ibrahimi (2006), Rubin (2002), and Roy (1990).
[452] Rubin; Roy (1990), p. 111, 129.
[453] FBIS-MEA-79-117, 09 June 1979, S1; FBIS-MEA-79-126, 16 June 1979, S5.

times that his group had been inspired by Iran's revolution and that the bonds of 'blood, proximity, and mutual interests bring together the two [Iranian and Afghan] revolutions.'[454] Most importantly, Iranian Foreign Minister Qotbzadeh organized an opportunity in January 1980 for Rabbani to speak on behalf of several of the major *mujahidin* groups at the Islamic Conference in Islamabad.[455] And by May 1980, the Kuwaitis informed the British that Rabbani was the 'top guy' for the Afghan *mujahidin* in Iran, but their caveat was that he received virtually no material support from the Iranian government.[456]

Lastly, Iranian officials established early ties with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his party *Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan* (Islamic Party of Afghanistan). Even though Hekmatyar was a Sunni, his party espoused a similar political ideology based on radical Islamic fundamentalism and anti-American rhetoric, which played well amongst conservatives in Iran.[457] According to Olivier Roy, Hekmatyar was strategic in creating ties with Iran and other countries in the Persian Gulf leading up to and following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.[458] In February 1980, Hekmatyar met with IRI President Banisadr in order to establish relations with Iran and discuss the possibility of Iranian assistance to his party. Flattering Iran, he told journalists, 'Iran is the only country that can help the Afghan Islamic Revolution.'[459] Unspecified levels of Iranian support for *Hezb-e Islami* was confirmed on program about the IRGC in April 1980, and *Hezb-e Islami* was described as 'not supported by Pakistan and China,' and a party of 'Islamic beliefs [that resists] any kind of non-Islamic tradition.'[460] Working with Hekmatyar would have proved challenging for any power, as Hekmatyar was fiercely independent, asserted in speeches that only Afghans could solve the political situation in Afghanistan without outside assistance, and insisted on leading all the Afghan *mujahidin* groups.[461] While Iran's support of

[454] FBIS-MEA-79-117, 09 June 1979, S1; FBIS-MEA-79-131, 3 July 1979, S1.
[455] FBIS-MEA-80-030, 30 January 1980, S23; FBIS-MEA-80-019-S, 26 January 1980, 30; CIA 'Afghanistan: Iran's Role in the Crisis,' p. 1.
[456] FCO, 8/3593, Folio 15, Tehran to MED, 19/5/1980.
[457] Rubin (2002), p. 213-214.
[458] Roy (1990), p. 121.
[459] FBIS-MEA-80-036-S, 21 February 1980, 8.
[460] FBIS-SAS-80-069, 7 April 1980, I31.
[461] FBIS-SAS-80-069, 7 April 1980, I31; FBIS-SAS-80-129, 1 July 1980, I3.

Hekmatyar would have also represented an opportunity for Iran because of Hekmatyar's status amongst those groups, Roy believes that his ties to the Iranian government always remained limited.[462]

Despite Iran's clear political support for the Afghan *mujahidin*, there were limitations to that support based on Iran's concern about Soviet and DRA reprisal as well as some domestic consternation by Iranians towards Afghans in their country. Early after the revolution, to avoid the perception of direct support for the *mujahidin*, Iran turned the other cheek and simply allowed the *mujahidin* freedom of movement to cross the Iranian border at will.[463] Additionally, while Iran permitted Afghans living in Iran to take part in political protests – many of which occurred on different occasions at the Soviet Embassy in Tehran and the consulates in other Iranian cities – when protests went too far, Iranian officials cracked down. Afghan protesters attempted to storm the Afghan and Soviet embassies in Tehran in early 1980 after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, leading officials to send the IRGC and Iranian police to retake and guard the embassies to avoid any possible Soviet retaliation.[464] However, when the Afghan *mujahidin* succeeded in a full takeover of the Soviet Embassy on the first anniversary of the Soviet invasion in December 1980, the IRGC was either unable or unwilling to do much to stop it. This drew strong condemnation from the USSR, which blamed the Iranian government for being complicit in the attack. Iranian officials retorted by saying in one breath that 'our abstention in taking part in this [event] does not mean we condone the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Iranian authorities have condemned this invasion;' and in another that, 'it is necessary to remind our Afghan brethren that such acts cannot be accepted by the Iranian nation.'[465] Domestically, the surge of Afghan refugees and politically active *mujahidin* in Iran caused some specific problems, especially in the provinces that bordered Afghanistan where many refugees lived. There were complaints in these communities about drug smuggling, pickpocketing, and other types of criminal

[462] Roy (1990), pp. 121-122, 134.
[463] FBIS-MEA-80-019-S, 25 January 1980, 7.
[464] FBIS-MEA-80-001-S, 1 January 1980, 22; FBIS-MEA-80-001-S, 1 January 1980, 22; FBIS-MEA-80-001-S, 1 January 1980, 19; FBIS-MEA-80-005-S, 6 January 1980, 16; FBIS-MEA-80-005-S, 6 January 1980, 17.
[465] FBIS-SAS-80-252, 29 December 1980, I6.

activity being carried out by Afghan refugees and *mujahidin*. In some instances, this caused the Iranian government to shut down the offices of certain *mujahidin* groups, and arrest individuals committing crimes on Iranian territory.[466] While some of this may have stemmed from deep-seated prejudice in Iran against Afghans, it also continued to exacerbate it.

Early Material Support to the Afghan *Mujahidin*

Mentioned previously, IRI officials initially denied providing any material support for the Afghan *mujahidin* in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, evidence exists to suggest that in the period following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian government in fact provided a limited amount of material aid including medical supplies, food, and clothing, while other elements of Iranian society began providing weapons, ammunition, training for the *mujahidin* on Iranian bases, and potentially even sent Iranian volunteers into Afghanistan to fight alongside the *mujahidin*.

Directly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Iranian officials began a public dialogue surrounding material support for the Afghan *mujahidin*. In January 1980, President Banisadr told AFP that he would help the Afghan rebels by all means, including militarily, and that he hoped to provide them with multifaceted military, economic, diplomatic, and other support as soon as possible.[467] Soon after, Banisadr and Foreign Minister Qotbzadeh threatened the Soviets that if they did not leave Afghanistan, Iran could aid the 50,000 Afghan refugees in Iran in guerrilla warfare against the Soviets. They made sure to clarify that as yet the Iranian government had not taken any military measures against the USSR in Afghanistan.[468] By March, Banisadr confirmed in an interview with a British reporter that the Iranian government was providing material aid for the Afghan rebels, saying that, 'large numbers of Afghan people are coming to Iran and Pakistan, and we help them materially as much as we can…they have not asked [for] arms from us. Indeed, they prefer medical and material aid and the like. When they ask for arms, we will respond

[466] FBIS-MEA-79-179, 12 September 1979, R1; FBIS-SAS-80-146, 17 July 1980, I21; FBIS-SAS-80-240, 07 December 1980, I21; FBIS-SAS-81-208, 27 October 1981, I1.
[467] FBIS-MEA-80-019-S, 26 January 1980, 34; FBIS-MEA-80-021-S, 29 January 1980, 4.
[468] FBIS-MEA-80-014-S, 19 January 1980, 4; FBIS-MEA-80-039-S, 25 February 1980, 10; FBIS-MEA-80-039-S, 25 February 1980, 2.

to their request immediately.'[469] As mentioned earlier, in April, a program on the IRGC confirmed the Guards' support for Afghanistan's *Hezb-e Islami*.[470] Similarly, in May, when Qotbzadeh was asked by Iran's *Pars* newspaper whether the government was providing 'support and aid' to the Afghan *mujahidin*, he was quoted as saying, 'this was the least we were able to do for the Afghan people.'[471] Qotbzadeh also said in June that while 90% of aid for the *mujahidin* came from Pakistan (leaving the source of the other 10% ambiguous), because of the Soviet invasion, even if the IRI were to send its troops into Afghanistan, it would not be considered 'interference.' He said he was hopeful that Iranian assistance would increase daily.[472] However, the scope of this support must have been limited because several Afghan parties at the time with whom Iran had already established political relations, claimed that Iran was providing them with little to no material support, despite their requests for it from the Iranian government.[473]

The reasons that the Iranian government would have been limited in their early material support for the Afghan *mujahidin*, as well as being obscure about what they did provide, were four-fold. First, Banisadr himself pointed to disagreements domestically within Iran's Revolutionary Council surrounding the issue of providing material aid to the *mujahidin*. This frustrated him greatly, and he was reported as saying that once he became president, he would disband the Council to avoid these types of policy roadblocks.[474] Importantly, Banisadr also said in February 1980 that the IRI had not yet given the *mujahidin* material aid because the IRI was in the process of distinguishing between the various Afghan groups to avoid supporting those with U.S. or Pakistan links, a process that he said would not be easy and would take time.[475] Thirdly, Ayatollah Beheshti, referring to Iran's economic and political constraints, explained that while Iran was committed to helping all struggling nations,

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[469] FBIS-MEA-80-060-S, 24 March 1980,11.
[470] FBIS-SAS-80-069, 07 April 1980, I31.
[471] FBIS-SAS-80-100, 20 May 1980, I6.
[472] FBIS-SAS-80-124, 25 June 1980, I7.
[473] FBIS-MEA-80-026, 04 February 1980, S3; FBIS-MEA-80-036-S, 21 February 1980, 8; FBIS-SAS-80-099, 17 May 1980, C5; FBIS-SAS-80-096, 08 May 1980, C7. One unnamed group said Iran provided them with medical supplies, food, and clothing.
[474] FBIS-MEA-80-041-S, 18 February 1980, 24.
[475] FBIS-MEA-80-030-S, 12 February 1980, 1; FBIS-MEA-80-034-S, 15 February 1980, 10.

they must realize that Iran's capabilities, especially at this particular time, were 'not very extensive'.[476] Lastly, Banisadr mentioned in June 1980 that while the IRI was planning to give the *mujahidin* military aid, any such aid would have to be approved by the *majlis*.[477]

However, these statements may not be at odds with specific accusations regarding the IRI's support to Afghan rebels by the DRA's and Soviet-backed media. Starting in July 1980, and consistently thereafter, the *National Voice of Iran* (NVOI) reported that Iran was training Afghan rebels in Iran-based camps, including one in Mashhad, that they were sending to Afghanistan to conduct operations against the DRA.[478] That publication also reported that Iranian nationals were arrested around Herat and Kabul for their 'revolutionary activities' in Afghanistan, alleging that they were members of *Hezb-e Islami* and pointing out that party operated on Iranian territory.[479] The DRA's President Babrak Karmal echoed these claims, telling a Paris paper in July that there were eight bases for training Afghan *mujahidin* located in Iran, compared to 57 in Pakistan, and five in China.[480] Even after the start of the Iran-Iraq War, according to Karmal, the number of bases increased: by April 1981 he accused Iran of working with the CIA to train and arm *mujahidin* on 10-12 Iranian bases.[481] Additionally, in August 1980, Afghan officials claim to have arrested an Iranian national named Mohsen Rezai, a confessed member of *Jamiat-e Islami*, in connection with 'counterrevolutionary riots' against the DRA in Kabul. The report says the man was born in 1959, around the same time as the notable IRGC commander with the same name. It also says he was brought from Iran to Peshawar to meet first with *Jamiat* leader Rabbani before going to Kabul. While this specific instance cannot be corroborated, the information in this report could indicate the early presence of an IRGC military advisor sent to fight alongside the Afghan rebels.[482]

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[476] FBIS-SAS-80-096, 14 May 1980, 17.
[477] FBIS-SAS-80-118, 14 June 1980, I1.
[478] According to the CIA, NVOI was a pro-DRA radio station based in Azerbaijan, then part of the USSR. FBIS-SAS-80-129, 02 July 1980, I9; FBIS-SAS-80-152, 04 August 1980, I19; FBIS-SAS-81-010, 15 January 1981, I19.
[479] FBIS-SAS-80-252, 27 December 1980, C11.
[480] FBIS-SAS-80-140, 11 July 1980, C1.
[481] FBIS-SAS-81-076, 21 April 1981, C1.
[482] FBIS-SAS-80-174, 18 August 1980.

Recently declassified U.S. and British government assessments from early 1980 through late 1981 confirm Iran's limited material support for the Afghan *mujahidin* and describe that support as primarily coming from non-government sources such as individual *ulema*, elements of the IRGC,[483] businessmen, and local officials. Several CIA memoranda from the period show substantial American interest in Iranian influence in Afghanistan, particularly after increased Soviet involvement in that country. The Americans were concerned that their national security interests would be affected by Iran's official or unofficial support to the *mujahidin*. This was because such support could provoke the Soviets to invade Iran to protect the USSR's position in Afghanistan, their interests in Iran, or against the possibility of any American incursion into Iran.[484] In an assessment of the possibility of Soviet intervention in Iran from February 1980, the CIA also referenced reports about the existence of training camps for the Afghan *mujahidin* in Iran.[485] In another assessment from March 1980 analysing Iran's policy to export its revolution, Banisadr's outward offers of support to the *mujahidin* are mentioned prior to a heavily redacted section explaining that Iran did in fact provide limited material support.[486] The analysis also estimates that there were 100,000 Afghan refugees in Iran at the time and says that some of the refugee camps near Mashhad and Zahedan were being used to train *mujahidin* to mount cross-border operations into Afghanistan against the DRA. However, the document concluded that Iranian aid 'appear[ed] to have little impact on the Afghan insurgency' and contested DRA accusations that recent uprisings in Herat in March 1979 had been directly supported by the IRI.[487]

The CIA provided more clarity about material support over the following months. In one report, the CIA claimed that Iran's religious leadership was 'already providing some training and arms support for the rebels, and [that] this [was] likely to increase' due to the pressure the religious leadership was putting on Iran's secular

[483] Earlier after the revolution, the IRGC had not fully integrated into a state-backed military institution, and the Iranian government was in the process of establishing the roles of the traditional Iranian Army (*Artesh*) versus the IRGC (*Sepah* or *Pasdaran*), the latter of which they created to protect the goals of Iran's revolution. For more information, see Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled.*
[484] CIA, 'Prospects for Soviet Intervention in Iran', 2/14/1980, p. 7.
[485] Ibid.
[486] CIA, 'Exporting the Revolution', 3/1980, p. 10.
[487] Ibid, p. 11.

leaders to support the *mujahidin*.[488] Details about the 'training and weapons support' were redacted, but the document includes that the Iranian *ulema* were also providing humanitarian support to Afghan refugees and that some these refugees were former Afghan military personnel training insurgents in Iran's refugee camps. The report states that it is unlikely the Iranian government would openly back the *mujahidin* because it would risk military retaliation by the Soviets.[489] But in a top-secret assessment from July 1980, the CIA pointed to Iran's increasing involvement in Afghanistan 'in the last few months.' While the document describes Iran's 'important' diplomatic support for the Afghan insurgents, it said the central government did not appear to be providing them material aid despite threats that it would. However, the report confirmed and expanded previous assessments that the *ulema*, elements of the IRGC, businessmen, and local officials were providing material support to the *mujahidin*, which it concluded was a reflection of a general consensus in Iran supporting the Afghan rebels' cause. According to the document, the *mujahidin* were training fighters in camps along Iran's border with Afghanistan, and IRGC units were providing support for cross-border operations.[490]

Since early June, the Soviets had expressed increasing alarm about these developments, but the CIA assessed that the tougher Soviet line about Iran's support was not likely to dissuade Iran and could in fact backfire, resulting in deteriorated Soviet-Iranian ties.[491] Iran apparently had little fear of the Soviet reaction to their own tough line on Afghanistan, with Iran convinced that it could resist any Soviet move into Iran through the same sort of large-scale civil disobedience that brought down the Shah.[492] The Soviets were reportedly concerned that Iranian officials' recent meetings with Chinese officials indicated cooperation with China to arm the Afghan insurgency. Russian media outlets were also accusing 'local authorities' in Mashhad of aiding the rebels with the help of the CIA but carefully avoided blaming

[488] CIA, 'Iran: Views of Afghanistan', early 1980 (est.), pp. i, 3. While this document is undated (except for the year, 1980), it appears in the context of its content to have been written later than the two previously cited CIA documents.
[489] Ibid, p. 4.
[490] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Iran's Role in the Crisis', 7/1980, pp. i, 3.
[491] Ibid.
[492] Ibid, p. 2.

the Khomeini government as being complicit.[493] The CIA determined that the Soviets faced a dilemma in dealing with Iran's role in Afghanistan, and that they would probably avoid the issue for some time. It was believed that as a last resort, the Soviets could increase pressure on Iran by putting more troops on Iranian border, increase its aid to leftists in Iran, and pursue insurgents across the border to disrupt their activity in refugee camps in Iran.[494]

Importantly, it was the opinion of U.S. officials at this time that given the state of confusion in Iran's central government, material support for the *mujahidin* from unofficial Iranian sources was likely given without the explicit approval and perhaps even without the knowledge of the central government.[495] The report concluded that 'Iranian involvement with the insurgents seem[ed] certain to increase, partly because [the government would] come under increasing domestic pressure to take a more active part in aiding the insurgents.' Additionally, the CIA said that Iranian volunteers were already working with Afghan insurgents inside Afghanistan.[496] The heavy redactions about the specifics surrounding Iran's material support in each of these CIA assessments would appear to point to the sensitivity and importance of the information, even to this day.

While the British documentary record on this topic is less fulsome than that of the United States, available British Foreign Office cables from this period corroborate some of the American assessments.[497] In an attempt to determine whether Iran was providing military support for the *mujahidin* in June 1980, British officials concluded that they did not expect that the IRI was doing it yet, even though they did think that Khomeini wanted to do so.[498] However, in July, British diplomats cabled about Iranian officials' appeal for assistance in subverting the DRA: they asked whether the UK would help establish a radio station beamed at Afghanistan from Oman as well as for weapons to supply to the Afghan *mujahidin*. British officials responded that they

[493] Ibid, pp. 4-5.
[494] Ibid, p. 5
[495] Ibid, pp. 2-3.
[496] Ibid, p. 3.
[497] Research indicates that there are currently no declassified British intelligence-services documents pertaining to Iranian influence in Afghanistan or support for the Afghan mujahedeen during this period.
[498] FCO, 8/3593, Folio 19, Tehran to MED, 2/6/1980.

did not want to be seen as providing weapons to the Afghan rebels because of possible Soviet backlash against the UK, but they agreed to provide Iran with medical supplies for the *mujahidin*.[499] Given the state of UK-IRI relations at this time, it seems unlikely that the Iranians would have requested arms from British officials for the *mujahidin* unless Iran was already providing them, or at least had decided to and had a way to provide arms to the rebels.

While not contemporaneous, a U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report from 1985 provides some of the only definitive specifics available on Iranian material support for the *mujahidin* during the early 1980s. The DIA concluded:

> Iran flirted with aiding Sunni-led Islamic fundamentalist *mujahidin* who were headquartered in Pakistan. Unspecified numbers of rifles (M-1, G-3),[500] land mines, shoulder-fired antitank rockets, heavy machineguns, uniforms, and boots were supplied to at least the *Hezb-e Islami* led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, for operations in southern and eastern Afghanistan. At the same time, however, Iranian support to *Harakat-e Islami* and the other Shiite groups in the Hazarajat region caused serious interfactional strife among resistance groups…in the central and western provinces in Afghanistan.[501]

These newly declassified sources detail previously unknown levels of early Iranian aid to the Afghan *mujahidin* upon which they continued to build an extensive support apparatus from 1982-1987.[502]

Iran and Afghanistan's Bilateral Relations Until 1982

In addition to active political and limited material support for the Afghan resistance, the Iranian government showed both indifference and hostility toward the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan early in both governments' relations. It is argued here that this was a strategy the Iranians purposefully pursued to undermine and delegitimize Afghanistan's communist government while also signally clearly to the Soviets that they opposed superpower presence in a neighbouring country.

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[499] FCO, 8/3593, Folio 21, SAD 'Notes on a call to Mr Coles,' 24/7/1980.
[500] M-1 refers to an American-made semi-automatic rifle in use by the U.S. Army as late as the Vietnam War. The G-3 refers to a German-made battle rifle still in use today in its newest variations.
[501] DIA, 'Iranian Support to the Afghan Resistance', 7/11/1985, p. 1.
[502] For example, Olivier Roy argues that the Iranian government never gave material aid to Sunni groups, including Hesb-i Islami. See, Roy, Olivier. *Afghanistan: From Holy War to Civil War* (Pennington, 1995), p. 99.

From the violent ascension to the Afghan presidency by PDPA Chairman Noor Mohammad Taraki and his communist allies in April 1978, the Saur Revolution, the DRA faced a challenge in its relations with Iran. As mentioned in the previous chapter, every change in government involving communists in Afghanistan seemed to confirm the Iranians' paranoia of direct Soviet intervention in the region. There was good reason for it: the Soviets had been engaging with the PDPA members involved in the coup of 1978 since at least 1975, and once these elements had taken power, they abandoned Afghanistan's historical power-balancing approach to the foreign powers for sole alignment with the Soviet Union.[503] It did not help that in the months following the Saur Revolution, Afghanistan saw 'a frenzy of bloodshed at a level not seen in Afghan politics since the nineteenth century,' which involved the murder and arrest of countless political opponents including rival communists, Islamists, and minority groups like the Shi'a Hazaras.[504] Thus, by the time Khomeini had returned to Iran from exile in France in February 1979 and formed the new Islamic Republic, Iranian-Afghan relations were strained and continued to be so, largely surrounding two issues: the DRA's accusations of Iranian interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs and the refusal of Iranian officials to engage in normal diplomatic relations with the DRA.

A key feature of post-revolutionary relations for both countries was that even if the IRI was not directly involved in interference in Afghanistan at this early stage, the success of the Iranian revolution and Khomeini's calls to 'brother Muslims' to stand up to oppression against their non-Muslim regimes was inspiring Afghans to revolt. This had an impact on Iran's relations with non-Islamist regimes with majority Muslim populations. This is clearly exemplified by the case of Iran and Afghanistan's nadir in relations surrounding the Herat uprising. In March 1979, Herati citizens, incited by the Afghan *ulema* and supported by an Afghan army regiment that had mutinied against the DRA, ransacked the city's government buildings and started a rebellion.[505] Given Herat's close proximity to Iran, DRA officials were actively

[503] Rubin (2002), pp. 104-105; Barfield (2010), p. 225.
[504] Barfield (2010), p. 228.
[505] Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan ,1979 to the Present (New York, 2005) pp.99-100*

suspicious of Iranian involvement. Afghan officials accused the IRI of sending 4,000 plainclothes Iranian troops into Afghanistan hidden amongst 7,000 Afghan refugees crossing back into Afghanistan from Iran.[506] As mentioned, Iranian officials had been sending conflicting messages regarding possible interference in Afghanistan: the foreign minister strongly rejected the claims of interference, while other IRI officials and religious leaders called upon the region's countries to support Afghanistan's anti-government rebels.[507] In response, the DRA expelled the Iranian consul in Herat.[508] Additionally, the DRA's then-foreign minister Hafizullah Amin doubled down and threatened incitement of Baluchi separatists against the IRI (Afghanistan's historical trump card) and blamed the CIA and western powers for fomenting discord between Iran and Afghanistan.[509] In an official statement in April, the Iranian foreign ministry explained that revolts taking place in Herat were simply inspired by Iran's revolution and blamed Afghan President Taraki for trying to shift the blame of his government's atrocities against his people.[510] A CIA assessment from 1980 also asserts that there was no evidence to suggest 'direct Iranian involvement' in the events in Herat.[511] In an unfortunate turn of events for Iran, the Soviets used the Herat incident to convince the DRA that an increase of Soviet troops into Afghanistan would help the DRA fight off its insurgents and foreign aggressors.[512] The DRA also set up loyal local militias to counter revolts by the insurgents.[513]

In an escalation, in June 1979, the Iranian government sent troops to the Afghan border following press reports of DRA officials threatening that they would start to bomb Iran (with Soviet backing) for Iran's support of the Afghan *mujahidin*.[514] In response, the DRA's Foreign Minister Amin stated that his government wanted friendly relations with the IRI and 'responsible persons in Iran,'

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[506] FBIS-MEA-79-057, 21 March 1979, R7; FBIS-MEA-79-054, 18 March 1979, S1; FBIS-MEA-79-056, 20 March 1979, S1; FBIS-MEA-79-085, 27 April 1979, S1; FBIS-MEA-79-100, 03 May 1979, S1
[507] FBIS-MEA-79-050, 13/3/1979, R2.
[508] FBIS-MEA-79-056, 21/3/1979, S1.
[509] FBIS-MEA-79-081, 21 April 1979.
[510]FBIS-MEA-79-083, 27 April 1979.
[511] CIA, 'Iran: Exporting the Revolution', March 1980, p. 11.
[512] William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, (Basingstoke: 2009), pp. 30-31.
[513] FBIS-MEA-79-105, 30 May 1979, R1.
[514] FBIS-MEA-79-124, 23 June 1979, R3.

acknowledging that perhaps only certain elements of Iranian society were supporting anti-government elements in Afghanistan.[515] However, Iran did not share the same sentiments about pursuing relations with the DRA. When Amin took the Afghan presidency from Taraki in September 1979, Iranian media reported IRI officials' view that relations with Amin would be handled in the same way as the IRI handled those with Taraki, meaning they would be distant due to suspected Soviet ties.[516] When Amin's government on multiple occasions extended an olive branch to hold talks with the IRI, the Iranians continuously ignored the requests.[517] Meanwhile, Iranian officials' statements, including those of Ayatollah Khomeini, against DRA-Soviet ties grew in intensity and frequency as reports of increased DRA-rebel clashes exacerbated paranoia on all sides. In August, Khomeini called upon Muslims in Afghanistan and Kurdistan to be wary of their non-Muslim governments, whose links to the superpowers made them 'hypocrites.'[518] By the end of 1979, this position only worsened. In November, then-Iranian Foreign Minister Abolhassan Banisadr made one of the more overt and inflammatory statements regarding Iran's stance on Afghanistan:

> [Iran has] a joint history with Afghanistan. The peoples of the two countries share the same religion and culture; therefore, we cannot witness any interference in our neighbourhood and remain idle about a policy which imposes a regime through inappropriate and forced policies. If independence is good, then we must wish it for everyone. We do not consider such issues as internal ones anywhere in the world. Consequently, ours is not a revolution which could be confined within borders.[519]

The other element of Iranian-Afghan relations after the revolution was Iran's categorical denial of diplomatic relations with the DRA because of the DRA's repression of its people and close relations with the Soviets. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had caused the Iranian government to take an even harder line on Afghanistan, as they felt the invasion offered decisive proof that Soviet regional domination was coming to fruition. The simultaneous installation of Babrak Karmal

[515] FBIS-MEA-79-182, 18 September 1979, S1.
[516] Ibid.
[517] FBIS-MEA-79-153, 7 August 1979, S7.
[518] FBIS-MEA-79-166, 24 August 1979, R5.
[519] FBIS-MEA-79-222, 15 November 1979, R12.

as the new Afghan president signalled that Afghanistan's government and military would be controlled by the Soviets. Signalling that Iran saw the invasion as a direct threat to its security, Iran immediately cut all postal and communication lines with Afghanistan.[520] The Soviets quickly attempted to allay Iran's fears by sending Soviet Ambassador to Iran Vladimir Vinogradov to Qom just days after the invasion to meet with Khomeini and present the Soviet case for presence in Afghanistan.[521] At the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980, the Soviets and DRA tried again to pressure Iran's position on Afghanistan, hoping Iran would be distracted, in order to block Iranian aid to *mujahidin* and the rebels' ability to cross the Iran-Afghanistan border.[522] Perhaps feeling vulnerable, Iranian officials decided to strengthen their ties with Pakistan, particularly on the Afghanistan issue. Hashemi Rafsanjani, then-speaker of the Iranian *majlis*, met with Pakistan's ambassador to Iran. He told him that despite the Iranian media's derision of Pakistan for its ties with America, the IRI wanted a close relationship with Pakistan, especially regarding Afghanistan, on which they had a common stance.[523] Pakistan looked to increase this cooperation when Baluchi separatists in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan began their own liberation front, something the DRA had previously threatened to incite.[524] Seeing this, the DRA pushed for bilateral talks with both Iran and Pakistan to discuss their support for the *mujahidin*, saying they had different issues to address with both countries.[525] In February 1981, Pakistani Foreign Minister Agha Shahi visited Iran to attempt to convince IRI officials to participate in a newly initiated effort to start UN-moderated, trilateral talks between the IRI, DRA, and Pakistan.[526] With no response from Iran on whether they would participate, Afghan President Karmal increasingly played a victim card, insisting that his government had done all it could to have productive relations with Pakistan and Iran, but that at no fault of his own, they

[520] FBIS-MEA-79-251, 28 December 1979, S2.
[521] CIA, 'Iran's Views on Afghanistan', early 1980 (est.). p. 4.
[522] The Russian Chiefs of Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War,* pp. 123-4.
[523] FBIS-SAS-80-183.
[524] CIA, 'Iran's Views on Afghanistan', early 1980 (est.) p. 6. The Afghans and Soviets knew that Baluchi independence would be a major threat to Iran and Pakistan's territorial integrity.
[525] FBIS-SAS-81-037.
[526] FBIS-SAS-81-025.

continued to refuse and subvert his government.[527] Karmal repeated this narrative to a gathering of elders in Herat in April 1981, where he undoubtedly knew it would get back to Iranian officials.[528]

By August 1981, the DRA even conceded to holding trilateral talks, abandoning their original stance on bilateral talks and attempted to dangle the resumption of trade ties with Iran to appeal to Iran's growing economic needs during the Iran-Iraq War.[529] But none of this swayed the Iranian officials towards establishing relations with the DRA. Finally in September 1981, during his speech to the UN General Assembly, Iranian Prime Minister Mir Hussain Mousavi made Iran's position on Afghanistan clear to the international community:

> The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran believes that the only way to solve the Afghanistan issue is the withdrawal of the foreign occupying forces from that country and the recognition of the rights of the people of Afghanistan for self-determination by their own hands…Any negotiations which would not include the true representatives of the Afghan people is not accepted.[530]

As talks between Pakistan and the DRA failed a couple of months later in November, frustrated DRA officials warned that the Soviets would not leave Afghanistan until Iran and Pakistan's interference in their internal affairs had ceased.[531]

To conclude, Iran's persistent rejection of formal bilateral relations with the DRA, along with its development of strong political and limited material support to the Afghan resistance, shows its strategy during this period to influence Afghanistan in order to subvert a communist government on its border and indirectly challenge Soviet aggression in the region. With ever increasing Soviet involvement in their neighbour's country, Iranian officials had to walk a careful line in order to avoid possible retaliation for Iran's meddling in Afghanistan. While IRI officials continued

[527] FBIS-SAS-81-035.
[528] FBIS-SAS-81-068.
[529] FBIS-SAS-81-164.
[530] FBIS-SAS-81-194.
[531] FBIS-SAS-81-211.

to worry that the Soviets would use Afghanistan as a base to subvert Iran, this did not deter them from continuing their hard line against the DRA and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, and indeed, in the following years, the Iranians increased their support for Afghan rebel groups with whom they had mutual interests.

Consolidating Control and Comparative Advantage: Iranian Influence in Afghanistan from 1982-1987

Iranian influence in Afghanistan markedly increased from late 1981 to 1987 as a result of several regional and domestic circumstances. This period saw a political sea change for Iran. The domestic scene had begun settling after the revolution into an increasingly more cleric-dominated political system as the religious leadership secured power over the government and asserted their expansionist vision for Iran's foreign policy. In terms of Iran's regional interests, the Soviet position in Afghanistan was growing weaker by the day, as battlefield successes by the mujahedeen pushed back Soviet and DRA territorial control to only Afghanistan's major cities. By 1982, Iran had established an upper hand in its total war with Iraq, a position they more or less held until 1986 despite increasing U.S. and Soviet technical and materiel support for Iraq. In fact, Khomeini was confident enough in Iran's position in 1982 that he not only rebuffed the chance to end the war but also rejected Soviet offers to supply Iran with weapons that it undoubtedly needed.[532]

The sum of these conditions actually increased Iran's ability to manoeuvre in other areas of its foreign policy in the wider region, despite many scholars' overarching assertions that throughout the 1980s Iran only prioritized Iraq in its foreign policy and was constantly mired by the Iran-Iraq War.[533] This section will show that to a large extent, that was not the case, as Iran pursued a dual-tracked policy from the end of 1981 to 1987 to 1) support the *mujahidin* in order to subvert the Afghan government and counter Soviet presence, and 2) consolidate its influence

[532] Iran increasingly distanced itself from any military and economic reliance on "East" or "West." Iran was, however, getting weapons from Soviet allies such as Libya and Syria and beginning to establish its own arms manufacturing program. See Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*.
[533] See: Mousavi (1997), *Hazaras of Afghanistan*; Roy (1990); Harpviken (1996), *Political Mobilization Among the Hazara.*

in Afghanistan to elevate pro-Iran elements in Afghanistan's political system. Using methods that would have maximal impact for attaining these goals with consideration for its economic limitations, Iran followed a policy after 1982 of increasing material and technical support only for the Afghan mujahedeen that were loyal to Iran, took an unwavering political stance to establish itself as a regional leader integral to the solution of the Afghanistan issue, and carefully controlled its large Afghan refugee population to suit Iran's needs and objectives rather than those of the refugees.

This period saw several key developments beneficial to Iran's security, ideological, and other goals: the weakening of the multinational process to find a political solution for Afghanistan that would not have benefitted Iran and that Iran did not support, the manipulation and weaponisation of Afghan refugees in Iran for use in Iran's various military adventures in the region, and increased Iranian control over and Soviet-DRA abandonment of the Hazarajat and parts of western Afghanistan on Iran's border. As part of its wider foreign policy strategy, these successes enabled Iran to leverage its consolidated influence in Afghanistan to gain key political, economic, and security concessions the two power that most challenged Iran's interests: the Soviet Union and the United States.

Iran's Political Stance on Afghanistan: The Iranian 'Proposal' and the Geneva Accords

Iran's November 1981 'Proposal for Afghanistan' is perhaps the most transparent view into the Iranian government's motivations regarding Afghanistan at this time that is publically available, yet it has not been afforded any coverage in the academic literature. Contrary to Roy and Rubin's assessment that Afghanistan remained a distant foreign policy priority for the Iranians, Iran's proposal for Afghanistan marked a shift in focus of Iranian officials toward the Afghanistan issue, even in the midst of the Iran-Iraq War.[534] The plan the IRI offered up was unique in that no other country put forth such a proposal and that it framed Iran's consistently strong stance on Afghanistan for the remainder of the decade. Discussed in this section, the foreign

[534] In fact, Iran viewed Afghanistan as a 'second front', the first being Iraq. The Soviets and DRA would threaten Iran not to intervene in Afghanistan by telling them it would open up a 'second front' (as reported in Iranian media). See, FBIS-SAS-80-118.

policy priorities discernible in Iran's proposal include: demonstrating with this plan that Iran was a leader of the Muslim community in keeping with the regime's ideological goals; quashing any possible international threat to this regional leadership by pressuring the Soviets to leave Afghanistan and keeping other superpowers from using the Afghanistan problem as a justification to expand their presence in the region; and, establishing the IRI as an integral part of the process for determining Afghanistan's political system after Soviet withdrawal. The effect of all three, if Iran had succeeded in implementing this proposal, would not have made Afghanistan an independent and Islamic sovereign state, as Iranian rhetoric consistently avowed, but rather a state heavily dependent on Iran and its neighbours both politically and militarily. Given the content of the plan, IRI officials' comments about the plan, and the international responses the plan engendered, it is clear that this was the Iranian government's objective in creating it.

Discussed earlier in this chapter, Iran had already begun to establish itself as an integral part of regional political dealings on the Afghanistan issue, as evidenced by its position on the Islamic Conference Organization's (ICO) Afghanistan committee that did not even include the DRA. This approach only intensified as IRI officials continued taking outspoken stances on the Afghanistan issue at the preeminent multilateral diplomatic engagements in the region, namely the ICO and the Nonaligned Conference.[535] However, Iran had been noticeably unreceptive to any western-proposed political processes on Afghanistan. By mid-1981, British officials lamented their inability to get the Iranians involved in a conference on a political solution for Afghanistan initiated by the European Ten: 'the presence of Iran in the Afghanistan committee of the Islamic Conference ensures that any suggestion of joint discussions with the [European] Ten would be ruled out. Our earlier attempt to engage the Iranians in discussions about Afghanistan were ignored. From the Iranian point of view Afghanistan is an Islamic problem and the West has no *locus standi*.'[536]

[535] FBIS-SAS-83-051, 15 March 1983, I1.
[536] FCO 37/2406: Folio 1, FCO to Tehran (now an interests section rather than an embassy); Folio 5, Internal FCO Memorandum, 6 November 1981.

The main motivations for the Iranian government's development of a proposal for a political solution in Afghanistan at this time included the fact that these international proposals were beginning to gain ground (including a UN-sponsored process), that the Russians seemed unlikely to leave Afghanistan and were inciting Baluchi separatists in Iran's territory, and that Iran's way to gain better control of the situation was to author its own process that could ensure their interests were advanced.[537] Before the release of Iran's proposal for Afghanistan, Italian officials noted that there was a general understanding amongst the international community that Iran, as a concerned neighbour, should have a vital role in any international discussions about Afghanistan. Yet, the Iranian government still refused to participate in international proposals. Then-Iranian Foreign Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi told the Italians that Iran would not consider any international initiative or discussions because most of the previous plans for Afghanistan had involved the west and the superpowers. Their involvement would make discussions unacceptable in the eyes of the Iranian government, who viewed the superpowers as ready to take advantage of the Afghan crisis to meddle in the affairs of the region.[538] Mousavi said clearly that there should only be an Islamic solution for Afghanistan, and that the countries entitled to take a collective interest in this would be the Islamic countries that had a religious affinity to the Afghan people and their problems. Upon hearing this, British officials remarked that this view was "wildly unrealistic" but that it fit within Iran's ideological line of promoting religious rule in other countries similar to Iran's style of government.[539]

Underlining its import to the IRI, Iranian officials marketed their forthcoming plan to Iran's domestic press for months before it was officially released. One such instance was in October 1981 when Foreign Minister Mousavi told Iranian press that the government was creating a plan for Afghanistan because Iran could not agree to previous plans proposed by the U.S. and Europeans and that Iran's instead would be

[537] FBIS-SAS-81-218, 11 November 1981, C4; FCO 37/2406: Folio 6, Internal FCO Memorandum, 18 November 1981.
[538] Mousavi apparently cited the American deployment of the rapid response force in the Persian Gulf as an example.
[539] FCO 37/2406: Folio 4, Tehran to SAD, 19/8/1981.

focused on Afghanistan's sovereignty. He also stated that the IRI "would like Afghanistan to have an independent and Islamic government."[540] Additionally, Mohammad Hussayn Lavasani, the political director of the foreign ministry's Afro-Asian Affairs Department, briefed press days before the announcement of the plan that it was imminent and hinted at many details about the plan, including that it was "in no way similar" to plans put forth by the international community.[541]

On November 10, 1981, the Iranian Foreign Ministry announced its plan for Afghanistan at a press conference in Tehran and released text of the plan in a communiqué.[542] The statement, cabled by the British Interest Section in Tehran and reported in Iranian media included the following points:

- The Iranian government had always been opposed to the occupation of the territory of oppressed countries by foreign troops;
- The United States justified its presence in the Indian Ocean, the Gulf, and Islamic countries because of the Red Army's occupation of Afghanistan;
- The Soviet occupation was 'illegal and oppressive" and encouraged U.S. expansion in the region;
- The plans put forward on the Afghan issue within the last year were aimed at bringing western forces to interfere in the region and did not sufficiently take into account Afghans' desire to control their own destiny;
- And, the Iranian government was therefore against the internationalization of the Afghan issue, which Iran saw as a problem that only concerned the Islamic world and should be solved by Muslim nations.[543]

The plan itself was structured to include two fundamental principles, the unconditional withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghan territory and the right of the Afghan people to determine their own destiny. The plan sought to enact several steps based on Iran's own revolutionary experience, which included:

> 1) The formation of an Islamic peacekeeping force made up of the forces of Iran, Pakistan, and an unnamed Islamic country that was opposed to the U.S. and Israel's "world imperialism"

[540] FBIS-SAS-81-208.
[541] FBIS-SAS-81-215.
[542] FCO 8/4031: Folio 2, Cable Tehran to FCO, 12/11/1981.
[543] FCO 8/4031: Folio 3, Cable Tehran to FCO, 12/11/1981.

2) The full withdrawal of Soviet forces to be replaced by the Islamic peacekeeping force
3) The repatriation of Afghan mujahedeen and refugees
4) The formation of a 30-person Islamic Council made up of the "combatant committed *ulema*" of the Islamic world
5) The formation of a Constituent Council (parliament) by the Islamic Council that would be elected from amongst the clergy and notables of Afghanistan and would:
    a) appoint a council to command the Islamic forces and the Afghan Army b) form a Revolutionary Council to run the executive affairs of the country
    c) hold nationwide elections for a Constituent Assembly
    d) carry out legislative duties in the transitional period

The Ministry's statement explicitly said that *only when* the Soviets had accepted the two principles at the fore of the plan, could they begin negotiations with Iran, Pakistan, and representatives from the mujahedeen on how to move forward.[544] In a noteworthy cabinet meeting that occurred the day after the release of the Afghanistan proposal, Prime Minster Mousavi led high-level Iranian officials in a discussion about the foreign ministry's new plan and the need to devote greater attention to the issue of Afghanistan.[545]

The fact that the IRI introduced such an audacious plan clearly demonstrates Iran's assertion of leadership and expectation of some level of control over the Afghanistan issue. The plan communicates Iran's desire to be heavily involved in determining the political future of Afghanistan and insists on the termination of foreign presence in the immediate region. Given that Iran was the only regional country to have the Islamic government that they were proposing and that the solution should in their view come only from Muslim nations, it follows that Iran would likely be at the helm of that solution. The fact that the IRI called for the creation of Islamic peacekeeping force that would be partially comprised of forces from Iran, and that a council of international *ulema* charged with establishing all of Afghanistan's transitional political institutions would also partially be Iranian, would help solidify Iran's control over Afghanistan's political future. British officials correctly pointed to this issue as being at odds with the second principle in Iran's

[544] Ibid. Emphasis added.
[545] FBIS-SAS-81-218, 12/11/1981, I3.

plan, to allow Afghans to choose their own destiny: "it is clear that the Iranian plan would concentrate power in the hands of the Muslim hierarchy. This can scarcely by described as letting the Afghan people decide their own fate in the form of government."[546] Even Iran's political advisor to the Iranian Embassy in London told British officials outright that Iran's proposal was the regime's attempt to address Afghanistan's crucial transitional period after a Soviet troop withdrawal.[547]

The plan's staunch position against U.S. and Russian presence in Afghanistan and the region would also serve to establish an environment in which Iran could lead the Muslim community, especially considering its already active role in regional processes. British officials assessed that Iran's emphasis on keeping the U.S. out of the area was partly to provide some sort of "face-saving" for the Soviets.[548]

The response of Iran's allies was important for the IRI in order to legitimize and gauge the potential success of their proposal, especially Pakistan, with whom Iran had close ties up to this point regarding Afghanistan. Interestingly, Pakistan's response has been described differently depending on the source. British Foreign Office documents from November 1981 assess Pakistan's reception as ranging from a "careful examination" of the proposal out of respect to a neighbouring state, to a "cautious and non-committal" attitude toward Iran's suggestions.[549] At the same time, Iranian foreign ministry official Husseyn Lavasani, who had just led a recent delegation to hold bilateral talks in Pakistan, said that from Iran's meetings with Pakistani officials, Pakistan had welcomed Iran's plan.[550] However, according to British accounts, the Pakistanis had said that they had not been consulted in advance about Iran's proposals during the Iranian delegation's visit.[551] Later on, the Pakistani Foreign Minister Agha Shahi told British officials in confidence that he saw the proposal as being "naïve," but that Pakistan would make a show of taking it seriously

[546] FCO 8/4031: Folio 6, Internal FCO Memorandum,'Iranian Proposals on Afghanistan,' 22/11/1981; FCO 37/2637, Folio 1, Internal FCO Memorandum, 'Call by the Iranian Director of European Affairs, Afghanistan, Points to Make,' 4/2/1982.
[547] FCO 8/4031, Folio 13, MED to British Mission to the United Nations, (n.d.).
[548] FCO 8/4031: Folio 2, Cable Tehran to FCO, 12/11/1981.
[549] Ibid; FCO 8/4031: Folio 5, Internal FCO Memorandum 'Iranian proposals on Afghanistan,' 22/11/1982.
[550] FBIS-SAS-81-215, 6/11/1981, I1.
[551] FCO 8/4031: Folio 6, Internal FCO Memorandum,'Iranian Proposals on Afghanistan,' 22/11/1981;

in the interest of maintaining good bilateral relations with Iran.[552] Conflicting information on Pakistan's response occurred again in April 1982 when IRI Foreign Minister Velayati travelled to Islamabad for expansive bilateral talks. Then, Shahi told British embassy officials that there was no discussion of Iran's Afghan proposal, which the Pakistanis had assumed "[was] now dead". [553] But Pakistani press reported a joint statement from both foreign ministers had thorough talks on Afghanistan and that they had agreed on all of the key principles outlined in Iran's plan.[554]

While the mujahedeen were not by any means a unified political force at this time, their response to Iran's proposal reveals much about their perception of Iran's intentions in Afghanistan. In a sharply worded statement from the three main resistance groups based in Pakistan, a spokesman said that only the Afghan mujahedeen were qualified to establish Islamic peace in Afghanistan and that they did not want the help of any outside forces.[555] Given that these groups were based in Pakistan and receiving that country's aid, it is not surprising that the IRI did not receive vocal support from them.

The Afghan government and Soviet Union's responses to Iran's proposal were, unsurprisingly to Iranian officials, extremely negative, and underline the growing suspicion the DRA and USSR had about Iran's involvement in Afghanistan's affairs.[556] Directly after the proposal's announcement, Afghan officials released scathing statements reported in international media, the most important of which was a formal DRA Foreign Ministry statement, which said:

> The authors of this so-called 'plan' appropriate the right for themselves to speak on behalf of and for the people of Afghanistan. But the pious, Muslim and freeborn Afghan people have never asked them for that…[These] 'proposals' advanced by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs are an outright and flagrant interference into the domestic affairs of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan…The authors of the 'plan' in their outrageous arrogance think that they can dictate to Afghan people what kind of political system they should have.[557]

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[552] FCO 8/4031: Folio 10, 'Call on Dr Rajai by Sir John Graham, 25/11/1981.
[553] FCO 37/2637: Folio 10, Cable Islamabad to FCO, 7/4/1982.
[554] FBIS-SAS-82-065.
[555] FBIS-SAS-81-218, 12/11/1981, C4.
[556] FCO 37/2406, Folio 9, Tehran to FCO, 26/11/1981; FBIS-SAS-81-225.
[557] FBIS-SAS-81-220.

The statement continued to condemn what it called the proposed subjugation of the Afghan people to occupation by Iranian and Pakistani troops and the 'outmoded' style of Islamic governance in Iran. The DRA's statement concluded by saying it 'totally and categorically rejected' the proposal, which would not be a basis for any negotiations, and implored 'the responsible quarters of Iran to be realistic…[and] abandon attempts to impose [itself] on the Afghan people.'[558]

The DRA felt Iran's transgression in creating the plan was serious enough to write a complaint letter about it to the UN Secretary-General on November 27, 1981. The language of the letter was the same as that of the Foreign Ministry's mid-November statement, and the DRA's permanent representative to the UN asked that it be circulated 'as an official document of the General Assembly' under agenda items related to strengthening good neighbourliness between countries, strengthening international security, and the UN office handling refugees.[559]

The first Soviet response to the proposal was for Soviet Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko to request a meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Mohammad Mokri the day after it was released. Perhaps signalling a key intention of the Iranian plan, according to Iranian press, the officials discussed Iran's proposal and Mr. Mokri then 'stressed during the meeting [Iran's] determination not to be subordinate in any way to the superpowers.'[560] According to British officials, the Soviet Embassy in Tehran had been naturally unwelcoming of the plan and had suggested that the Iranians hoped to turn Afghanistan into a satellite, while appropriately noting 'look who is speaking' in the margins.[561] Later that month, the Soviets ran an article in government-backed *Pravda* newspaper that quoted the DRA foreign ministry's November 15 press conference about the matter.[562] In response to Moscow and Kabul's reaction to Iran's proposal, Prime Minister Mousavi told Iranian and international press that his government knew the USSR and DRA would not like their plan, but that it was not for them but for the Afghan people. He went on

[558] Ibid.
[559] United Nations (hereafter UN) A/36/723. S14771, 11/27/1981.
[560] FBIS-SAS-81-218.
[561] FCO 37/2406: Folio 9, Tehran to FCO, 26/11/1981.
[562] FCO 8/4031: Folio 7, Moscow to FCO, 16/11/1981.

to say that Iran believed the peoples' reaction so far had been 'extremely favourable.'[563] It was apparent to western officials that Mousavi hoped Iran's proposal would help the Soviets come to the realisation that they could not remain in Afghanistan and that the world's Muslims would not be complacent about their presence in an Islamic country.[564]

Despite the mainly negative responses to the IRI's proposal for Afghanistan, Iranian officials stubbornly stuck to the principles of their plan, which became increasingly evident in their consistent position on Afghanistan in the following years. This manifested most explicitly in Iran's refusal to engage in the multilateral, UN-mediated Geneva Accords, begun by UN Special Representative to Afghanistan Diego Cordovez in early 1982. As their main condition for a political solution for Afghanistan was not met until early 1988—the withdrawal of Russian troops—Iran continued to assert its necessity along with the other principles of its proposal rather than become directly involved in the UN process with Pakistan and the DRA. Referring to the plan, in March 1983, Prime Minister Mousavi said Iran had by far the clearest and strongest stance on the Afghan issue, and castigated other regional countries at the Nonaligned Conference for being too afraid to stand up to the superpowers.[565]

Additionally, Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati took the opportunity at every UN General Assembly from 1982 through 1986 to mention Iran's unchanging 'principles' on Afghanistan, which were those outlined in Iran's November 1981 proposal. In fact, his statements on Afghanistan became increasingly lengthy and hard-charging over the course of those years.[566] This, coupled with Iran's lack of participation in the UN-brokered political process for Afghanistan show Iran's inflexibility and lack of prioritisation of any political process, especially one that did not result in greater Iranian influence in Afghanistan's post-Soviet political system.

[563] FBIS-SAS-81-225.
[564] FCO 37/2406: Folio 9, Tehran to FCO, 26/11/1981.
[565] FBIS-SAS-83-051.
[566] UN A/37/PV.27, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986.

Iran's Material Support for the Afghan *Mujahidin*—A Lesson in Exporting the Revolution

Iran's refusal to seriously engage in any political process for Afghanistan that involved the sitting Afghan government and interested regional parties made it clear that Iran's primary foreign policy position for Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation would involve the alternative: a military approach. This took shape in a semi-covert campaign to subvert the DRA and install an Islamic government in the Iranian model. There is substantial, previously unexamined evidence that the Iranian government and Iran's clerical establishment pursued this course of action by increasing the level of material support provided to select Afghan resistance groups from 1982 through 1987. This section will describe how several domestic and international factors aligned to catalyse Iran's more active policy toward Afghanistan in 1982, which included: Iran's offensive successes in its war with Iraq, the domestic political ascendency of those in Iran's clerical establishment that favoured an interventionist foreign policy, and the Soviets' tilt toward Iraq in the war and their increased supply of arms to Iraq.

It is argued here that while some Iranian aid to the mujahedeen was piecemeal and likely uncoordinated, the IRI's escalating support for mujahedeen groups in western and central Afghanistan, particularly pro-Iran groups, was a calculated and strategic approach to furthering two goals that had a direct impact on Iran's security and its regional interests: first, to sustain pressure on the Soviet Union to leave Afghanistan and on the DRA to end its hostilities against the *mujahidin* and Afghan people, and second, to establish a longer-term foundation for Iranian influence over certain elements of Afghan society that it could later exploit for political and economic gains in Afghanistan's future political system. While Iran likely knew that its impact would be limited on the former goal when compared to the efforts of the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia-United States axis—which brought vast amounts of international financial support to bear for the *mujahidin*—this suited Iran's interest in avoiding any major Soviet or DRA reprisal for Iran's interference while it was at war with Iraq. On the latter goal, Iran's support to *mujahidin* groups that were more pliable showed Iran's longer-term strategy of influence for a post-Soviet era in

Afghanistan. None of this was lost on the DRA or the Soviets, both of which saw Iran's support for the mujahedeen as one of the greatest irritants in their relations with Iran. And yet, despite high risk of reprisal (via Iraq or directly against Iran), some direct confrontation between Iranian security forces and Soviet/DRA forces, and Iran's economic and military constraints, Iran's continued pursuit of their subversive activities in Afghanistan during this period reveal their strategic importance to Iran's objectives.

Domestic Conditions: The Rise of the Clerical Elite and the IRGC

As mentioned previously, after the Iranian Revolution, Iran's regional expansionism took form in Iran's political and material support to Muslim 'liberation movements' including those in Afghanistan, a policy centred on the principle of 'exporting the revolution.' Iran's revolutionary leadership believed that because their revolution was unique and novel, if they did not encourage similar revolutions in the region, Iran would become isolated in an unfavourable environment of hostile regimes. Thus, the export of Iran's revolution as a tenet of the regime's founding ideology was established in a large part to ensure its survival.[567] The concept is enshrined in Article 154 of the Iranian Constitution of 1979, which states: "While scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the affairs of other nations, [Iran] supports the just struggles of the oppressed [*mustad'afun*] against the oppressors [*mustakbirun*] in every corner of the globe."[568] The contradiction inherent in supporting the oppressed while also refraining from interfering in the affairs of other nations was one of the principle issues dividing the regime's leadership in determining how to implement Iran's foreign policy.[569]

Competing for which state organizations would be charged with Iran's foreign policy, this divide was split between those in Iran's early civilian leadership, such as Mehdi Bazargan, who favoured a less interventionist interpretation of exporting the revolution, versus several in Iran's clerical leadership, including Ayatollah Hussein-

[567] CIA, *Iran: Exporting the Revolution*, March 1980, p. 1; Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled,* pp. 235-6.
[568] The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran of 1979, Article 154, p. 37. <https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf?lang=en> [8/21/2017].
[569] Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam,* p. 104

Ali Montazeri, who favoured a more radical interventionist approach to exporting the revolution.[570] Ayatollah Khomeini, as the regime's leader, pragmatically straddled these two positions, careful in public to describe exporting the revolution as Iran inspiring the region's Muslims to rise up against their oppressors rather than directly (materially and otherwise) supporting such uprisings.[571]

However, Khomeini's pan-Islamist rhetoric and his desire to consolidate his control over the government by bolstering Iran's clerical establishment and its revolutionary organizations, gave outsized power to those who favoured the more literal, interventionist approach for Iran's foreign policy. One such revolutionary organization, established by Khomeini in April 1979, was the IRGC.[572] Leading IRGC scholar Ali Alfoneh writes that Khomeini established the IRGC under the supervision of Iran's Revolutionary Council, of which he was head, because he needed a separate, trusted armed group to protect the revolution from any opposition by rival militias and the Iranian Army, which he was suspicious towards because it had existed during the Shah.[573] As such, a 'fundamental alliance' was born between the Guards and the Shi'a clergy that had led the revolution. The rise of the IRGC was deliberately planned so that the Guards could then reciprocate their patrons' support by protecting them. This manifested legally in the 'extraordinary codified powers' given to the IRGC in the IRI's constitution, which included the Guards' broad mandate to protect the regime from internal and external threats as well as their *duty to assist liberation movements of the oppressed*.[574] Thus, as Alfoneh points out, there was 'little doubt that the Revolutionary Guards from the first year of the revolution considered itself the primary agent of the export of the revolution.'[575]

Described by Kenneth Katzman—who wrote one of the seminal works on the IRGC— unlike its defensive, protective role, 'the Guard's export of the revolution activities were proactive, rather than reactive.' In this way, the Guards were Khomeini's 'foot soldiers' for the outward advancement of the major ideological

[570] Ibid, p. 106, 110; Alfoneh, Ali. *Iran Unveiled*, p. 212.
[571] CIA, Iran: Exporting the Revolution, March 1980, pp. 1-2.
[572] Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam,* p. 102; Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled,* p. 17.
[573] Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, p. 8, 10.
[574] Emphasis added. Ibid, p. 16-17.
[575] Ibid, p. 205-206.

pillar of the revolution, the *velayat-e faqih,* in order to 'implement Khomeini's vision of a revived Islamic *ummah* (unified Islamic nation), headquartered in Tehran and led by Khomeini.' Katzman adds that, while the supreme leader and the Iranian president technically led the IRGC, the Guards were 'fanatically loyal to Khomeini' and looked to him first and foremost in the execution of their duties.[576] Shortly after the revolution, Khomeini began using the Guards to suppress his political rivals at home, including the civilian leadership of the Bazargan and Banisadr governments, which generated those leaders' resentment towards the Guards. Successive civilian governments had attempted to reign in the Guards' power by integrating them into Iran's regular armed forces or denying the Guard's access to heavy weaponry, yet these attempts backfired. Khomeini instead reinforced the IRGC's domestic power by refusing to implement any of the curtailments and putting the Guard's further under his and his representatives' control.[577] Pertinent to the timeline of this case, the end of 1981 was the turning point in which Iran's clerics had cemented their domination in Iran's political system with the help of the Guards. This alliance remained strong, keeping the IRGC powerful and with a great degree of autonomy from the supervision of other state institutions for the remainder of the 1980s.[578]

Once empowered, the clerical leaders and guardsman who championed interventionist foreign policy further developed the IRGC's apparatus for exporting the revolution. Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri was the main clerical figure in this regard. While some of the Guards' commanders and Iran's civilian leaders wanted to pursue an Iraq-first policy after the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War, Montazeri pushed for supporting liberation movements abroad, even if it funnelled resources away from the war effort.[579] With a considerable support base in the Guards, Montazeri's religious authority as the designated successor to Khomeini gave legitimacy to those who aligned with his radical vision for Iran's foreign policy. Montazeri's patronage led to the formation of the Office of the Liberation Movements (OLM) within the

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[576] Katzman, Kenneth. *Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard,* (Boulder, 1993), pp. 35, 95.
[577] Alfoneh, pp. 19-20, 23, 93-94.
[578] Katzman, p. 56-57; CFR, "Iran's Revolutionary Guards," 6/14/2013. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/irans-revolutionary-guards>; Harpviken, Kristian Berg. 'Political Mobilization Among the Hazaras of Afghanistan, 1978-1992 (1996), p. 80.
[579] Katzman, *Warriors of Islam,* p. 82; Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam*, p. 112.

IRGC, the main mechanism through which the export of the revolution and Montazeri's vision for Muslim resistance movements abroad was executed.[580]

At first, the OLM was run by Ayatollah Montazeri's son Mohammad Montazeri until the latter's death in 1981, and then by Mehdi Hashemi (a relative to the Montazeris by marriage).[581] Both the younger Montazeri and Hashemi were powerful guardsmen who had been members of the Guard's precursor militias that essentially operated as terrorist organizations abroad during the Shah's reign, successfully cultivating armed networks within foreign Shi'a communities in Lebanon and Palestine for conducting subversion operations.[582] It is thus no surprise that the OLM's activities abroad continued in this vein. As another IRGC scholar, Ashfon Ostovar, writes, '[The OLM] announced that its primary mission was to develop contacts between the Guards and outside Muslim organizations that were "fighting for freedom from the servitude and fetters of Western and Eastern imperialism and global Zionism".' Crucially, the scope of the office's operations was broad, but the majority of its efforts were dedicated to expanding Iranian influence in Iran's immediate neighbourhood, including Lebanon, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Montazeri's creation of OLM 'made foreign operations an actual and not simply rhetorical part of the IRGC's mandate.'[583] Additionally, Katzman explains that secrecy was a key component of the Guards' foreign operations: 'The non-specificity and fluidity of the Guard's export of the revolution apparatus reflected the nature of the mission—the need to prevent the targets of this activity from positively identifying the Guard's responsibility for it.' This enhanced the Guards' ability to act autonomously, and they 'vigorously pursued export of the revolution activities despite apparent opposition, or, at best, ambivalence, from its civilian superiors.'[584]

One of the key findings of this work include that the increased support for Afghan resistance groups from 1982–1986 aligns with the heyday of the IRGC's

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[580] Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam*, p. 112. The OLM was the precursor to the IRGC's *Quds* (Jerusalem) Force, the branch that was later charged with the Guards' covert activities abroad. See, Steven O'Hern's *Iran's Revolutionary Guard,* p. 71.
[581] Ibid.
[582] Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, pp. 9-10, 210-211.
[583] Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam*, p. 112.
[584] Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, pp. 96, 101.

exportation of Iran's revolution.[585] Two things catalysed greater political backing that enabled the increase in IRGC covert foreign operations beginning in 1982: first, the success of the spring 1982 Iranian offensives against Iraq had given Iran's leaders the confidence to continue the war rather than end it as well as to pursue 'extraterritorial ambitions,' and second, Israel's mid-1982 invasion of Lebanon greatly angered Iran's leadership and spurred the Guards' radical interventionists into action against one of the main imperialist threats to their ideology.[586] Noticing these changes, Iran's Foreign Minister Velayati complained to Rafsanjani in early 1982 about the 'signals sent by the Office of the Liberation Movements that deviated from the line of the Foreign Ministry.' When Mehdi Hashemi sought Rafsanjani's advice about possible interference in the OLM in mid-1982, Rafsanjani recounts in his memoirs that he told him not to worry and that parliament would clarify the status of the OLM, with it continuing to operate under the Guards in the meantime. According to Alfoneh, continuing internal divisions amongst the revolutionary leaders may have 'led to a lack of top-level coordination of the policy, but [it] never stopped the export of the revolution.'[587] The research of this work finds that the highest-level leaders in Iran during this time assented to the OLM's controversial and seemingly contradictory activities, helping to explain the Islamic Republic's dual-tracked, overt and covert foreign policies.

Formerly sceptical, Ayatollah Khomeini, and other members of Iran's Supreme Defense Council, including President Khamenei, Rafsanjani, and top IRGC commanders became more interested in and permissive of the OLM by early 1983 when they understood that it had successfully organized Lebanese Shi'a militants under IRGC control for conducting operations against Western and Israeli targets.[588] There were several public statements by Iran's top leaders that show this shift in

[585] Harpviken also recognizes 1982-1986 as a period of increased Iranian material support for the Afghan resistance but does not explain, contextualize, or provide a detailed description of this support. See Harpviken, p. 80.
[586] Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam,* p. 109-110, 112; In fact, Alfoneh argues that the IRGC convinced a skeptical Ayatollah Khomeini to continue the war in Iraq, showing the great extent of their influence to control the scope of their activities and pursuit of their own interests. See, Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled,* p. 221.
[587] Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, p. 221-222.
[588] Ibid, pp. 223-4.

support, including this one from Prime Minister Mir Hussein Mousavi in January 1984:

> We must remember that our weapon in foreign policy is not the respect of the great powers toward us, but the backing of the innocent and disposed nations. Therefore, we must, more than ever before, rely upon the foreign policy of the Islamic combatants. It seems that using the thoughts of the likes of martyr Mohammad Montazeri regarding the export of the revolution is today necessary.[589]

This statement clearly shows the ideational underpinnings of Iranian nationalism, as described in this dissertation's theoretical framework. The organisation of 'Islamic combatants' culminated in 1982 and 1983, in the IRGC's, mainly through the OLM, establishment (and continued building) several groups. These include *Hezbollah* in Lebanon, and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and its armed wing, the Badr Corps, all led by the Guards and all loyal to Khomeini.[590] However, what is much less studied, and discussed in the following sections, is the extent of the IRGC, Iran's Foreign and Interior Ministries, and individual clerics, contributed to the Iran's establishment of similar proxies for Afghanistan. These efforts resembled a somewhat cohesive strategy to provide substantial internal (Iran-based) and external (Afghanistan-based) support for the Afghan resistance. Though little examined in the literature, the results of these activities had important ramifications for Iran's policy toward Afghanistan and its wider regional policy to this day. The IRGC and other state institutions cultivated networks in Afghanistan much the way they did elsewhere in the region, through the establishment and/or support of political resistance organizations of certain target nations (Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, etc.), the radicalization and weaponisation of refugees of target nations living in Iran, and infiltration of IRGC operatives and trained resistance fighters to conduct on-the-ground subversion operations in target nations' territories.

[589] Quoted in 'Ayeneh-ye Taffakorat, Farhang, Niaz-ha Rouhiat,' *Howzeh* (Qom, Iran), February 1984, p. 135 from Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled,* p. 225-6, 243.
[590] Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam*, pp. 110. For more information about the IRGC's activities in Lebanon and Iraq, see Ostovar, pp. 109-117, Katzman, pp. 96-101, and Alfoneh, pp. 221-228.

Iranian Base of Support for the Afghan Resistance: the *Ulema* Connection, Weaponisation of Refugees, and the Military Apparatus

Completely neglected from the literature on this period is Iran's creation of an internal base of support for the Afghan resistance. This policy risked domestic upheaval over the vast presence of Afghan *mujahidin* and refugees, as well as direct Soviet and DRA retaliation on Iranian soil. The purpose of creating a base of support in Iran for the Afghan resistance was to tightly control elements of the *mujahidin* in order for the IRI to effectively 1) subvert the DRA and the Soviets' activity in Afghanistan and Iraq, then leveraging that against those and other actors, and 2) cultivate lasting networks based on religious and ethnic identity amongst key communities of Afghans so that the regime could later exploit those inroads for a larger role in Afghanistan's post-soviet governance. The Iran-based system of support for the Afghan *mujahidin* in the 1980s thus included the following: further developing the ideological bond between the Iranian and Afghan *ulema*, the latter of which would become the commanders of several Iran-based Afghan *mujahidin* groups; recruit Afghan refugees in Iran to become *mujahidin* fighters, either voluntarily through ideological means or by force; and the establishment of a substantial military apparatus, including bases for training the fighters and the formation of Afghan-only corps, to carry out IRI-backed subversion operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. While some scholars suggest that Iran's efforts to support the Afghan *mujahidin* inside Iran were meagre and uncoordinated, this research shows that the amount of activity and the preponderance of high-level IRI figures and state institutions involved in these activities would make it very unlikely that coordination, or at the very least, the pursuit of shared objectives, did not exist. Additionally, given Khomeini's stronghold over the individuals and state institutions involved, his approval or acquiescence of these activities would have been necessary for them to take place to the extent that they did during this period.

As mentioned previously, by late 1981, there were already several Afghan resistance organizations based in Iran. These included *Harakat-e Islami, Sazman-e Nasr, Hezbollah Afghanistan,* and several other small organizations such as *Nehzat,*

Niru-e Islam, Raad, and *Jabha-ye Mutahid* (United Front).[591] The Iranian Ministry of Interior was the state institution responsible for the coordination of Afghans in Iran, leading a secretariat of representatives from other state institutions which each had a specific role to play. Those included the ministries of education, health, intelligence, labour, and foreign affairs, as well as the Supreme National Security Council (to coordinate domestic refugee policy with foreign policy), the IRGC, and other branches of Iran's armed forces (to enforce these policies).[592] In early 1983, the Ministry of Interior announced for the first time what Iran intended for these resistance groups: the only Afghan parties allowed to operate in Iran would be those that 'conform[ed] to the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and [were] not affiliated with either superpower.'[593] Iran's approach was more calculated than in Pakistan, where the state exercised less control over the many *mujahidin* organizations operating on its soil.[594]

A key part of the effort to align the Iran-based Afghan resistance organizations with the Islamic Republic's policies began with Iran's *ulema*, including those in high positions of government. Iran's *ulema* had been cultivating their ideological and ethno-linguistic bonds with Afghan clerics and theological scholars in Iran, some of whom led Iran-based resistance organizations, especially with what developed into the three largest Shi'a parties: the pro-Khomeinist *Nasr* and *Pasdaran* and Islamist *Harakat-e Islami*.[595] As Iran scholar Kristian Harpviken noted, 'The Shi'ia [sic] clergy of Afghanistan shared their educational background with Iranian

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[591] Emadi, Hafizullah, *Politics of the Dispossessed: Superpowers and Developments in the Middle East,* (Westport: 2001), p. 35-6. Unlike other scholars have posited, Iran did maintain relations and allow Sunni *Hezb-e Islami* and *Jamiat-e Islami* to operate in Iran. While they did receive some support from the IRI, it does not appear to have been comparable to the level they gave to Shi'a groups. Both groups mainly got support from Pakistan, the U.S. and China, which caused Iran to be wary of them and less inclined to support them. It would appear that any such support was an effort at hedging given that it was likely these groups would have a role in governing the post-Soviet Afghan state.

[592] Majidyar, Ahmad and Alfoneh, Ali. "Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Refugees as Political Instruments," American Enterprise Institute (AEI) for Public Policy Research, No. 5, November, 2010, p. 2.

[593] FBIS-SAS-83-043.

[594] NARA, AAD, AF01814, Congressional Research Service Report by Stuart D. Goldman, 10/7/1986, pg. 24.

[595] *Nasr* and *Pasdaran* were commanded by Hazara clerics. In contrast, *Harakat-e Islami* was run by non-Hazara Shi'a clerics, including Qizilbash and other Shi'a tribes. Dorronsoro, p. 162; Harpviken, Kristian Berg, *Political Mobilization*, Appendix Four.

colleagues, many had studied in Najaf under Ayatollah Khomeini. Political groups were established among the [Afghan] Hazara students, who later became building blocks in the resistance organisations.'[596] Another scholar, Jan Grevemeyer, called this the 'ideologization of the resistance and the establishment of clergy as political leaders' for Afghanistan in the model of Iran's Islamist state.[597] As with many of the Afghan resistance groups (Sunni and Shi'a), the educated were often in command of resistance groups because of their ability to coordinate between their Afghan and external offices, and communicate in writing with their external sources of support, which were essential for their existence.[598]

Ayatollah Montazeri, with his oversight of the IRGC'S OLM and as Iran's second highest clerical authority, had a major role in promoting connections between Iranian and Afghan *ulema* in order to bolster the Afghan resistance. He and other high-level Iranian *ulema* who were linked to the IRGC and state apparatuses charged with exporting the revolution frequently organised conferences and meetings with Afghan *ulema* and resistance organizations. As early as 1981, the IRGC's OLM began cultivating its ties to the Afghan resistance. In late November, the OLM held a meeting at IRGC central headquarters for the Islamic liberation movements of several countries, including Afghanistan. The groups issued a resolution citing Ayatollah Khomeini and Montazeri's pan-Islamic calls to action to free the oppressed Muslims of the world.[599] Importantly, on April 26, 1982, Ayatollah Montazeri held a meeting in Qom with Khomeini's representative to the IRGC, the head of intelligence and research for the IRGC, and Mehdi Hashemi, in which the latter 'reported on the activities of the [liberation] movements and the support expressed by the Guards Corps for liberation movements through this unit [the OLM].' After the briefing, Montazeri spoke only of the Afghan resistance's struggle against the Soviets and DRA, condemning the oppression of Afghan Muslims.[600] Only one day later, IRGC

[596] The Hazaras made up a disproportionately high percentage of the Afghan refugee population (and therefore the Iran-based Afghan resistance). For more see Harpviken, p. 85 and Mousavi, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan. An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study*, (Richmond: 1998), pp. 64, 152.
[597] Grevemeyer, Jan-Heeren, *Ethnicity and National Liberation: the Afghan Hazara Between Resistance and Civil War* (1988).
[598] Dorronsoro, p. 118; 122-3, 162, 143.
[599] FBIS-SAS-81-224.
[600] FBIS-SAS-82-081.

headquarters issued a rare public statement on its Afghanistan policy on the fourth anniversary of the April 1978 communist coup:

> The brave and Muslim Iranian nation, while *lending its complete support* to the ideological and martyrdom-seeking movement of the Muslim nation of Afghanistan, *believes that only through reliance upon beloved Islam and an armed jihad can they respond to the aggressive enemy*, expel them from the Islamic country of Afghanistan and establish an Islamic government. Only the 'Neither Eastern nor Western' movement which is based on Koranic and ideological values can liberate the deprived people throughout the world.[601]

The statement, coming just months after the Iranian government issued its political proposal for ending the Afghan conflict, now indicated that one of the government bodies most active in Iran's foreign affairs only advocated support of the resistance's armed *jihad* as the solution for Afghanistan. This shift gathered momentum in 1983 with Iranian leaders' continued contacts with Afghan *ulema* and resistance leaders. In January 1983, Mehdi Hashemi coordinated a meeting between Ayatollah Montazeri and Afghan theologians and scholars in Qom, during which Montazeri made a speech praising their movement and saying, 'now that the struggling clergy of Afghanistan is being organized, it should take note of the secret of the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran. The…clergy played an essential role during the different stages of the revolution.' Montazeri stressed the importance of the unity of the clergy in their struggle and issued a call to action: 'the Muslim and sincere Afghan youths are selflessly defending Islam, their country's independence, and their religious sanctities…The struggling clergy of Afghanistan is expected to assist and lead these struggling youths without any reservations.'[602] A month later, Iran's state-sponsored IRNA reported Montazeri's meeting with *Hojjat al-Islam* Mohammad Akbari—an Afghan cleric leading *Sepah-e Pasdaran*, the resistance group named after and commanded by the IRGC—during which Montazeri pledged Iran's continued support.[603] Then in May 1983, Montazeri met with over 500 Afghan *ulema* and theological students in Qom during which he condemned Soviet aggression and

[601] Emphasis added. FBIS-SAS-82-082.
[602] FBIS-SAS-83-012.
[603] FBIS-SAS-83-043.

discussed the duty of the Islamic Republic to provide for the needs of the Afghan refugees in Iran.[604] These frequent contacts continued through 1986 as Iran's support for the resistance deepened.[605]

The Afghan *ulema* in Iran followed Montazeri's call to action to build their resistance efforts. While the *ulema* were the resistance commanders, their groups' fighters would often consist of Afghans they recruited from the refugee population, described by Afghanistan scholar Gilles Dorronsoro as 'a considerable prize for the Afghan political parties.'[606] Afghan refugees in Iran were even classed as *mohajerin* (forced religious migrants) rather than *panahandeh* (refugees), the former term being 'more dignified than *panahandeh* in post-revolutionary Iran' and serving the purpose of tying the refugees to a religious identity that would be exploited for *mujahidin* recruitment purposes.[607] In one such example in March 1983, the IRNA reported on Montazeri- and Hashemi-connected Mohammad Akbari appealing to a large group of Afghan refugees and *ulema* in Iran for voluntary participation or contribution to the resistance. Akbari reportedly implored them on religious grounds to 'step up their efforts…to vigilantly aid the Muslim Afghan revolutionaries to continue their fight against the Soviet occupiers and the present imposed regime of Afghanistan.'[608] Dorronsoro also points to the financial importance of refugees to the *mujahidin* organizations, as the groups often redirected some of the funds intended for refugees into their coffers based upon their use of refugees as fighters.[609] Interestingly, when the IRI was negotiating with the UNHCR to establish facilities to aid Afghan

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[604] FBIS-SAS-83-103.
[605] For other examples of Montazeri's contact with the Afghan resistance after 1983, see: FBIS-SAS-85-053, FBIS-SAS-85-099, FBIS-SAS-85-101, FBIS-SAS-85-108, FBIS-SAS-85-117, FBIS-SAS-85-147, FBIS-SAS-85-160, FBIS-SAS-86-022. Showing their loyalty to him, Afghan (and Iraqi) resistance groups also voiced support for Ayatollah Montazeri's selection as Supreme Leader designate in December 1985, see: FBIS-SAS-85-249.
[606] Dorronsoro, Gilles. *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present*, p. 170. Dorronsoro says that the Afghan resistance groups had less success recruiting amongst the refugee population in Iran because there were 'no camps' for refugees in Iran, but this work refutes that claim. He also neglects to describe the IRGC's role in recruiting Afghan refugees to become *mujahidin*.
[607]Majidyar, Ahmad and Alfoneh, Ali. 'Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Refugees as Political Instruments,' American Enterprise Institute (AEI) for Public Policy Research, No. 5, November, 2010, p. 2.
[608] FBIS-SAS-83-057.
[609] Dorronsoro, p. 143.

refugees in Iran, the Iranian authorities said they were only interested in cash assistance (which UNHCR was not in the practice of providing).[610]

The Iranian government did not leave the Afghan *ulema* in Iran the sole responsibility of recruiting *mujahidin* for their organizations. The IRGC and other state institutions became heavily involved in a systematic effort to recruit, as well as force, Afghan refugees to become *mujahidin* to serve Iran's own purposes over the needs of the refugees. In order to do this, Iran needed to establish a calculated approach for handling its rapidly growing Afghan refugee population. The foundations of this system began in October 1981 when the Ministry of Interior Undersecretary for Political Affairs Mohammad Hossein Sorureddin announced the establishment of the Afghan Refugees Coordination Office in the Interior Ministry. This office would determine how many Afghan refugees resided in Iran, where they were located, and work with the local Afghan councils and provincial governors to and better manage the refugees. At that time, the ministry said that there were 1.5 million Afghan refugees in Iran, but the British Foreign Office contended that it was more likely around half a million.[611] However, by early 1985, British officials accepted the 1.5 million figure due to the increase in refugees continuing to flee Afghanistan.[612]

This sharp increase in the number of refugees in Iran between late 1981-1985 heightened the IRI's need to get a grasp on the situation. Domestically, there was tension following mass exoduses of Afghans to Iran after brutal Soviet offensives, such as one in Herat in April 1983 that killed as many as 3,000 people.[613] To justify the influx, the IRI used the opportunity to tell the public that the Afghans coming to Iran clearly thought that Marxism had failed in Afghanistan and that the Muslim Afghan people had fled to Iran because they wanted an Islamic government like Iran's.[614] There had also been widespread concern during the paranoia of the 1982-83

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[610] FCO 8/5146: Folio 2, Tehran to FCO, 8/3/1983; The UNHCR began its support of Afghan refugees in Iran around February 1982, according to the British Foreign Office. See also FCO 37/2637, Folio 1.
[611] FBIS-SAS-81-208; FBIS-SAS-84-105; NF1, FCO 37/2637, These sources describe the difficulty of establishing the number of Afghan refugees in Iran, since many Afghans came to Iran as migrant laborers prior to the Soviet Invasion.
[612] FCO 8/8599: Folio 1, Tehran to MED, 11/4/1985; Folio 2, Tehran to MED, 21/4/1985.
[613] FCO 37/2406, Folio 5; FBIS-SAS-83-081; FBIS-SAS-83-085.
[614] FBIS-SAS-83-092.

crackdown on the communist Tudeh Party that some Afghan refugees were Tudeh spies for the Soviets or the DRA.[615] However, there is little evidence that the DRA or Afghan communists ever had direct links of note to Iran's Tudeh Party.

It was in this context that the Interior Ministry announced that it would begin distributing mandatory identity cards to Afghan refugees in February 1983, citing employing and organizing them, as well as determining which Afghans were 'bona fide' versus 'fraudulent' (spies). It also gave authorization for Afghans in Iran to operate political organizations as long as they did not break the laws of the Islamic Republic.[616] Iran also made several infrastructure investments to handle the Afghans seeking refuge there. An early 1983 World Food Programme expedition to eastern Iran to study potential aid to the Afghan refugees determined that the IRI had established three 'transit camps' for the refugees in Iran, with one or two more almost completed, and about 10 more under construction in the south and east. A major camp with a few thousand refugees was located near Birjand, a small town about 60 miles west of the border with Afghanistan's Farah Province, as well as at a border crossing in Mirjaveh in Iranian Baluchistan. They also noted that the refugees living inside the camps seemed to have been well treated by the Iranian authorities, and those living outside the camps (many in Mashhad and Zahedan) appeared to move around with relative ease.[617]

However, in mid-1984, the IRI decided to issue another round of ID cards, a move that showed signs of a more concerted repression of refugees deemed disagreeable to the Iranian regime. Explaining the necessity for this measure, an Interior Ministry official told IRNA that some Afghan were refusing to get ID cards, and those who refused or 'failed to accept the principles of the Islamic Republic…would be decisively treated.'[618] The MOI ordered that all provincial

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[615] Mohsen Rezai, commander of IRGC, said publically that some in the Tudeh were being trained in Afghanistan to conduct anti-IRI activities. FBIS-SAS-83-092; FBIS-SAS-82-045; FBIS-SAS-83-097.
[616] FBIS-SAS-83-043; AF01445 Cable from Islamabad to Sec State DC, 3/31/83, 310450Z; FBIS-SAS-83-604.
[617] NB: these 'camps' for refugees are separate from the training camps for the Afghan mujahedin but there may be some crossover between the 'transit' camps and reported 'prison' camps. (See next section) NARA, AAD, AF01445 Cable from Islamabad to Sec State DC, 3/31/83, 310450Z.
[618] FBIS-SAS-84-105.

governors deport Afghans without ID cards.[619] The MOI said publically that ID cards were meant to ensure that all Afghan refugees could be offered benefits such as welfare, cultural, and health services. But, for those who agreed to fight as *mujahidin* in Iraq or Afghanistan, the Minister of Interior said that it was the ministry's policy 'to grant further welfare services' to them and their relatives, including money, protection for family, wives, land, or citizenship.[620] For impoverished refugees without legal status in a new country, this offer would have been nearly impossible to refuse. The MOI also claimed that the Afghan *mujahidin* organizations supported the use of the ID cards to ensure that DRA and Soviet spies were not infiltrating their ranks.[621]

However, anti-regime media sources quickly began accusing the IRI of using the ID cards as a way for the IRGC to force refugees to serve as *mujahidin* for Iran's subversive operations in the region. These publications cited growing discontent amongst the IRGC and the Iranian public about the Iran-Iraq War and alleged that Afghan refugees were being sent to the front as 'cannon fodder' before more Iranian lives were wasted.[622] There is some evidence to support these allegations. A May 1984 CIA intelligence assessment describes the Iranian authorities' efforts to force Shi'a refugees to join Afghan *mujahidin* organizations in Iran in order to even receive ID cards to get access to food rations.[623] In another example, the IRI reportedly preyed on the Afghan migrants who had settled in Iran prior to the Soviet Invasion, either making them redundant from their jobs or refusing to grant their work permits in order to financially compel them to serve as fighters in Iraq or Afghanistan for a small stipend.[624] In some instances, Iranian authorities prohibited some refugees from ever obtaining jobs in Iran, or held their families hostage, giving them no recourse but to fight as *mujahidin*.[625] A questionnaire found by a British Foreign Office

[619] FBIS-SAS-83-237.
[620] FBIS-SAS-84-105; FBIS-SAS-83-236; Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC hereafter), SH-GMID-D-001-432, Memorandum from Iraqi Defense Ministry's General Intelligence Directorate to Iraqi Armed Forces General Command, 12/18/1983, Subject: Iranian Infiltrators.
[621] FBIS-SAS-83-236.
[622] FBIS-SAS-83-156; FBIS-SAS-83-167; FBIS-SAS-84-136
[623] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984.
[624] FBIS-SAS-86-131.
[625] NSA, CO001280, CIA Internal Memorandum, 'Afghan immigrants and refugees in Iran,' 3/29/1983. FCO 8/5146, Doc 8

official also suggests that Afghan refugees had little choice over whether they would become *mujahidin*. Writing that the document 'appear[ed] authentic and [bore] the imprint of the Ministry of the Interior, and beneath it the heading "Afghana Garrison, Sabzevar"' its text read:

> a) In what circumstances did you leave Afghanistan?
> b) Why did you come to Iran?
> c) When and how will you return to Afghanistan?
> d) Are you ready to be trained and serve as a Mujahid [sic] against the Communist interventionist forces?[626]

While most of the refugees in Iran were Shi'a, recently declassified American and British government assessments from the period describe a much worse situation for Sunni Afghan refugees in Iran. Because Iranians had what they felt was good cause for suspicion that some refugees could be Soviet or DRA spies, Iran herded as many as 40,000 Sunni Afghan refugees into 'prison camps' surrounded by barbed wire in order to better surveil them. The camps were run by the IRGC, with two locations identified in Zahedan and Birjand, and the refugees there were used as labourers and forced to do other menial jobs that the IRI required.[627] The sum of these methods caused thousands of refugees to flee Iran to Pakistan in 1983.[628] The Afghan government often accused the Guards of arresting, murdering, or forcibly repatriating the refugees that were trying to flee Iran.[629] The persistence and brutality of some of the IRI's efforts to shore up fighters from its Afghan refugee population show its desperate need for manpower to achieve Iran's security objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The IRI finally admitted in late 1983 that there were Afghans fighting for Iran in Iraq and elsewhere, but that these fighters did so voluntarily with support from the

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[626] Sabzevar is about 50 miles west of Mashhad and 100 miles from the Iran-Afghanistan border. FCO 8/5146, Folio 11.
[627] These documents describe Iran's greater suspicion of Sunni rather than Shi'a refugees because of their greater level of control over the Shi'a refugees. NSA, CO001280, CIA Internal Memorandum, 'Afghan immigrants and refugees in Iran,' 3/29/1983.; NSA, AF01445 Cable from Islamabad to Sec State DC, 3/31/83, 310450Z, 'WFP Mission Studies Establishment of Food Aid Program in Iran'; NSA, CO001395, CIA Internal Memorandum, 'Iranians Harass Afghan Refugees', 1/17/84; For a first-person account given by an Afghan refugee in September 1983 to British officials: FCO 8/5146, Folio 12.
[628] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984.
[629] FBIS-SAS-87-031; FBIS-SAS-85-249.

Iranian government. In an unusually candid interview in December 1983, Iranian Interior Minister Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri admitted publically that some Afghan refugees were *mujahidin* fighting alongside Iranian forces in Iraq. He explained that their 'lives and children are under the shelter of the Islamic Republic,' calling their participation 'a source of pride…[which] causes a great deal of pain to our enemies.'[630] The Afghan government and Iranian communists seized on this admission, saying that it was evidence that the regime was selfishly forcing the refugees to fight in its war.[631] In reality, Iran's use of Afghan refugees as *mujahidin* reveals truth in both narratives—both voluntary and forced recruitment.

While little scholarly work has been published on *Iran-based* support for Afghan *mujahidin* organizations, Afghan and Iranian sources reveal the IRGC's establishment of a military training apparatus in Iran to train and deploy Afghan *mujahidin* during this period. The IRGC provided at least basic military training for Afghan *mujahidin* in several different training camps across Iranian territory. The types of training appear to have ranged from two to three months of basic training to more specialized guerrilla warfare training for Afghan men aged 17 to 40.[632] One captured Iran-backed *mujahid* told a Kabul publication that both IRGC and German instructors taught his cohort in Iran how to use landmines, including cabled and pressure mines, and stressed that the best targets in Afghanistan were gas pipelines, bridges, schools, and state buildings due to the expense caused by the damages.[633]

While there are many references to the existence of these training camps in general,[634] there are also references to specific locations in Iran. For example, a captured employee from the Iranian Consulate in Herat alleged seeing training camps

[630] FBIS-SAS-83-236.
[631] FBIS-SAS-83-238.
[632] FCO 8/5146, Folio 8; FBIS-SAS-85-053. Fittingly, three months of basic training corresponds to the IRGC's model for its own recruits, see Katzman, pp. 91-2.
[633] FBIS-SAS-85-053.
[634] The following include select governmental and individual accounts of the existence of Iranian training camps for the Afghan *mujahidin* in general: FCO 8/5146, Doc 8; FCO 37/2637, Doc 16; FBIS-SAS-84-012; FBIS-SAS-84-136; FBIS-SAS-85-053; FBIS-SAS-85-070; FBIS-SAS-85-074; FBIS-SAS-85-216.

in Taybad and Mashhad.[635] Additionally, it is likely that Afghan *mujahidin* were trained on pre-existing IRGC bases. A June 1985 ceasefire treaty brokered by Ayatollah Montazeri between multiple infighting Afghan *mujahidin* organizations (including *Nasr*, *Pasdaran*, etc.) shows that some of the signatories listed are various bases for the Afghan *mujahidin*. These were the Central *Khatam ol-Anbiya* base, the Central *'Ali ibn Abi Talib* base, the Central *'Idalat* base, the Central *Risalat* base.[636] The Central *Khatam ol-Anbiya* base is actually the joint headquarters of Iran's Army and the IRGC.[637] The training of Afghans on Iranian military installations is supported by Ali Alfoneh and Will Fulton's research, which found that the IRGC used its own *Ansar* base in Zabol as early as 1982 'to train the Afghan Shi'a, and to direct intelligence operations on Afghan soil.' They also point to Iranian sources that provide 'evidence of Ansar Base commanders monitoring events in Afghanistan and reporting to the IRGC Command Council as early as October 2, 1984.'[638] While the actual number and location of military training camps is likely indiscernible from available sources, by April 1985, the DRA in an official letter of complaint to the UN, accused Iran of having established 'tens of the military training camps on Iranian territory for the murderers and counter-revolutionary bands.' They contended, "*The territory of Iran is one of the main basis [sic] of aggression and interference against our revolutionary country*."[639]

There is also much evidence detailing the two fates of Iran-based Afghan *mujahidin* once their training had been completed. According to multiple sources, the Afghans would either be sent with the Iranians to fight in the Iraq war or the Levant (against Israel) or go to Afghanistan to fight with the *mujahidin* against the

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[635] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 2/13/1984, 'Driver at Iranian Consulate in Herat "Confesses,"' Kabul Home Service in Dari, 10/2/1984, Part 3 The Far East; C. AFGHANISTAN, FE/7565/C/1.
[636] FBIS-SAS-85-117; FCO 8/8599, Folio 11, SAD to Tehran, 25/6/1985.
[637] FBIS-SAS-86-056.
[638] Alfoneh and Fulton argue that the Ansar Base and activities based there were central in the experiences of IRGC commanders who went on to become part of the Quds Force. Alfoneh, Ali and Fulton, Will, *Quds Force Commander and Candidate: Ghoramreza Baghbani*, American Enterprise Institute (AEI) for Public Policy Research, No. 3, April 2012.
[639] Emphasis added. UN A/40/273 S/17135, 4/30/1985.

Soviets.[640] Iraqi intelligence memoranda from the period assert that Iran would first send Afghan *mujahidin* to their priority warfront against Iraq, and only send those *mujahidin* who had survived to then fight their own war for independence against the Soviets. It is unclear whether this was the usual order of things. The Iraqi government also had intelligence that a deal was made at a meeting between the IRGC and some of the major Afghan resistance groups in Iran whereby the groups would send half of their *mujahidin* to fight with the IRGC in Iraq and the other half would be left to fight in Afghanistan in return for Iranian weapons, supplies and training.[641] Several recent sources also conclude that the IRGC developed separate Afghan-only corps within their own ranks for fighting in both conflicts. According to several Iranian scholars, the corps fighting in Iraq was called the Abouzar Corps, established in 1984 by the OLM, and the in Afghanistan was the Mohammad Corps.[642]

By 1984, the CIA estimated that the IRGC had been instructing at least '1,000-2,000 Afghan Shi'a insurgents in small arms and guerilla warfare each year,' that the number was expected to increase, and that 'training [was] given only to pro-Iranian Afghan Shi'as, who must agree to foster pro-Iranian organizations when they return to Afghanistan.'[643] Anti-Iran sources cite a much higher number of Afghan fighters trained in Iran. According to Iraqi officials, as many as 45,000 Afghans had been 'forced or coerced' into fighting for Iran against Iraq in the 1983 offensives.[644] By the end of the war in 1988, Iraq's figure skyrocketed to an estimated 150,000

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[640] Afghan *mujahidin* announce fighting with the IRGC in the Levant in 1984: FBIS-SAS-84-034; FCO 8/5146, Folio 8.
[641] The groups involved were Hekmatyar's *Hezb-i Islami, Nasr, Raad, and Afghan Hezbollah.* CRRC, SH-GMID-D-001-432, Memorandum from the Military Attache at the Embassy of Iraq in Kabul to the General Military Intelligence Directorate, 3/25/1984, Subject: A Meeting in Iran.
[642] Toumaj, Amir, "IRGC-trained Afghan Fatemiyoun Division Operative Killed Near US Base in Southeastern Syria," *TrackPersia.com,* 6/8/2017; Alfoneh, Ali,"Shia Afghan Fighters in Syria," *Atlantic Council,* 4/19/2017; Nadimi, Farzin, "Iran's Afghan and Pakistani Proxies: In Syria and Beyond?" *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy,* 8/22/2016. Interior Minister Nateq-Nouri discussed Afghans who serve within the IRGC but did not say in what capacity, FBIS-SAS-83-238. The IRGC's establishment of an "independent brigade of Afghans" is also referenced in a mid-1988 letter between Iraq's intelligence service and the President's office. CRRC, SH-GMID-D-001-460, Iraqi Intelligence Service to the Office of the President, 8/28/1988, Subject: The Afghani Volunteers, pp. 8-9.
[643] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984.
[644] CRRC, Memorandum from the Military Attache—Military Intelligence Directorate (Iraq) Regarding Iranian-Afghan Relations, December1983-March 1984, 12/3/1984. SH-GMID-D-001-432

Afghans.[645] While it is impossible from available sources to determine the exact number of Afghans the Iranians weaponised during the 1980s, the level of strategy and the conditionality of the IRGC's organization, training, and deployment of Afghan *mujahidin* very clearly demonstrates the IRI's use of ideology to ensure the success of its pragmatic political and security and interests by actively engaging in subversion in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Iranian Support for the Afghanistan-based Resistance: the West and the Hazarajat

The other crucial component of Iran's material support of the Afghan *mujahidin* was the strategy it employed within Afghanistan itself. Iran's support of groups on the ground in Afghanistan achieved two specific objectives in line with the regime's security and ideological goals: first, in supporting mostly Shi'a groups in western Afghanistan fighting against the Soviets and DRA, the IRI sought to maintain that area, particularly Herat Province, as its traditional buffer zone mainly for security reasons; and second, in consolidating control of the mainly Shi'a Hazarajat region of central Afghanistan, Iran developed a semi-autonomous microstate where its loyal clients would eventually provide Iran with a means to influence Afghan politics at a national level.

Iran's ability to influence these two regions stemmed not only from patron-client relationships with the *mujahidin* but also from its longstanding cultivation of religious, cultural, and ethnolinguistic connections with the Afghans living there.[646] Because of the domestic political ascendency of Iranian clerical leaders advocating for an interventionist foreign policy, Iran's worsening economic and military limitations due to its war with Iraq, and increasing competition from Pakistan's massive support for other mujahedeen groups,[647] Iran shifted its strategy in 1982-

[645] As many as 150,000 Afghans may have fought against Iraq by mid-1988. CRRC, SH-GMID-D-001-460, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Iraq) to Office of the President, 'The Iranian Regime and the Recruitment of Afghans,' 16/ 8/1988.
[646] Dorronsoro points out the longstanding religious connections. Dorronsoro, p. 146.
[647] Pakistan's aid was seen as a direct threat to Iran because it was coming principally from Iran's rivals (the United States and Saudi Arabia) whose expanded influence in Iran would weaken Iran's influence. See Wilde, p. 19-20. To understand the inability of Iran to match this aid while at war,

1983 to channel the majority of its support groups to Shi'a *mujahidin* group with which it could establish ideological loyalty.[648] Further sectarianizing the conflict by clearly delineating between and backing only the *mujahidin* loyal to Iran resulted in the greatest return on Iran's relatively small investment.

Iran's support for the Afghan resistance in the western provinces is the most distinctive example of Iran's dual purposes in supporting the Afghan *mujahidin*. In the west, Iran was preoccupied by the security pressures brought about by active Soviet and DRA offensives near Iranian territory, and simultaneously, Iran was concerned with maintaining traditional and cultivating increased influence in the west to keep it intact as a buffer zone against superpower intrusion and insecurity in the rest of Afghanistan. And yet, there has been remarkably little focus in the literature on Iran's material support of the *mujahidin* based in western Afghanistan given the area's strategic importance on Iran's border.

Recently declassified American intelligence assessments describe how conditions in the western provinces were ideal for Iran's monopolization of the supply routes to the *mujahidin* operating there. According to the CIA, western Afghanistan was a crucial vein of supply and transit between Iran and the *mujahidin* throughout all of Afghanistan. Most of the licit and illicit traffic in goods, weapons, and fighters between Iran and Afghanistan took place between Tayebad and Herat on the all-weather, hard-surfaced highway connecting the two cities. In 1982, the western provinces were less populated than other parts of Afghanistan, which made these provinces ideal for smuggling and insurgent activity. There were few roads elsewhere in the border region, particularly on the Afghan side, but vehicles could move in most areas, and the Soviets could not monitor movement without difficulty due to a lack of wide-ranging helicopter patrols or the presence of adequate of ground forces units. This made the border easy to cross in most areas for the insurgents.

American aid, according to Barnett Rubin, started at $30 million in 1980, increased to $50 million in 1981 and 1982. Then Reagan increased it to $80 million in 1983 and $120 million in 1984. Congress doubled the aid of 1985 to $250 million, plus an extra allocation for anti-aircraft weapons. So, the American budget to the *mujahidin*, reportedly matched by Saudi Arabia, climbed to $470 million in 1986 and $630 million in 1987, where it remained through 1989. See Rubin, p. 30.

[648] Harpviken makes the point that 'the ethnic/sectarian boundary was reinforced by exclusion of the Shi'a Muslim Hazara from the Sunni Pakistan-based resistance.'

While the policy in Tehran just after the Soviet invasion was to restrict smuggling to the insurgency in western Afghanistan to avoid Soviet reprisals, the local incentive to smuggle arms was strong and unchecked. Inroads were made as Iran's border security apparatus was unable to control the uptick in 'surreptitious traffic that provide[ed] support to the Afghan insurgents.'[649] Still, the insurgency in the west struggled with a lack of weapons, ammunition, and supplies in the early 1980s. Far from the main supply line of the Peshawar-based *mujahidin* groups in Pakistan, some turned toward Iran for support.[650]

This was furthered by Iran's religious and ethnolinguistic ties to the *mujahidin* operating in the west and the ability to unite the pro-Iran *mujahidin* on that basis. During the 1980s, between 50-70% of the Afghans living in Herat city were Shi'a, with about 15% Shi'a on average in the west as a whole (Herat, Farah, and Nimruz Provinces), and most of the rest being Persian-speaking Tajiks that could 'mingle unobtrusively on either side of the [Iran-Afghanistan] border.'[651] This corresponded to the ethnic and religious composition of the *mujahidin* parties active in the west, which were primarily Persian-speaking Tajiks and/or Shi'a Muslims. The west's *mujahidin* in the early 1980s were spread across more than 23 separate *mujahidin* groups that were generally highly fragmented and lacked coordination. Iran took full advantage of these circumstances.[652]

British and American government assessments detail how the relative failures of Soviet and DRA offensives in western Afghanistan in the early 1980s primed the region for an increase in Iranian involvement. Soviet and DRA attempts to fight the western insurgency and prevent the infiltration of supplies and fighters from Iran into western Afghanistan in 1979-82 were frequent but largely unsuccessful. Soviet and Afghan forces were less active in the west than they were in eastern Afghanistan, treating offensives in the west as secondary in importance.[653] The deployment and

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[649] NSA, AF01372, CIA Intelligence Assessment, 'Afghanistan-Iran Border: The Environment and the Insurgency,' 9/1982.
[650] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984, p. 4.
[651] FCO 8/5146, Folio 8; Dorronsoro, p. 100; CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984; NSA, AF01372, CIA Intelligence Assessment, 'Afghanistan-Iran Border: The Environment and the Insurgency,' 9/1982.
[652] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984, p. 4.
[653] Ibid, pp. iii. 1, 3.

strength of Soviet and Afghan forces near the Iran-Afghanistan border did not change significantly in the years following the Soviet invasion. According to the CIA, as of December 1981, the Soviets had one reduced strength motorized rifle division, with about 200 tanks and 9,500 troops near the border to conduct counter-guerrilla operations, and the Afghans had an understrength infantry division with at most 3,000 troops stationed at Herat to launch aperiodic sweeps against guerrilla forces.[654] As such, the estimated 15,000 insurgents in the area outmanned them, their tactics were reaping battlefield successes, morale was high, and casualties were low.[655] The failures of Soviet-occupied DRA were visible looking at Afghanistan as a whole: by January 1983, the insurgency controlled 62% of the districts in Afghanistan, with the DRA controlling only 38%, a reversal from the 40% insurgent and 60% DRA control in December 1980. The insurgency had a decisive advantage over population control in January 1983 (60% insurgent, 40% DRA control) up from the stalemate it faced in December 1980 (49% insurgent, 51% DRA control).[656]

The lack of Soviet and DRA success in and prioritization of the west left a vacuum that Iran exploited by helping to better organize and arm certain *mujahidin* groups and monopolize the west's supply lines. This increased Iran's overall influence over the *mujahidin* in the area while the groups they supported remained vigilant against Soviet and DRA presence around Iran's border. Assistance that was once provided through informal avenues soon became official backing. By mid-1982, an assistant to Iran's Deputy Minister of the Revolutionary Guards had announced that the IRGC was actively supporting the insurgency inside Afghanistan.[657]

The IRI's choice of *mujahidin* parties to whom they would provide official material support changed over time along with Iran's priorities. Up until 1983, Iran worked to fill the vacuum in western Afghanistan by first aligning itself and increasing aid to the most powerful, established parties of either sect in the region,

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[654] CIA, Memorandum from Deputy Director of Central Intelligence from National Foreign Assessment Center, 'Increased Tension and Some Military Reinforcement Along Iran-Afghanistan Border,' 12/1981.
[655] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984, p. iii.
[656] NSA, CO001311, CIA Memorandum, 'Afghanistan: Population of Government-Controlled Areas,' 10/6/1983.
[657] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984, pp. 4-6.

namely Sunni *Jamiat-e Islami* and Shi'a *Harakat-e Islami.* Both parties were active in fighting the Soviets and had cooperative networks with *mujahidin* throughout Afghanistan. However, when the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan drastically increased their material support to the Peshawar-based *mujahidin* groups, Iran's two aforementioned allies further cultivated their ties with Pakistan, which became a threat to Iran from both a security and an ideological standpoint.[658] As Iran's Islamists at home strengthened their hold on power domestically, 'support for a broad [Sunni *and* Shi'a] Afghan resistance faded,'[659] and yet Iran's maintenance of reduced contact with these groups showed an interest in continuing to hedge their bets should other strategies fail.

The IRI's new strategy began in 1983 when the Iranians shifted their policy to provide material and other support to only the Shi'a *mujahidin* groups in the west that were strictly loyal to Iran and promoted the regime's ideology. In so doing, Iran consolidated pro-Iran parties, placed some under the direct command of the IRGC, built up their force strength, and provided them weapons, supplies, and safe harbour in Iran when necessary. Iran also actively deprived other groups of similar support and advantages. Given the semi-covert nature of official Iranian support for the *mujahidin* (as described earlier), there is a dearth of reliable sources that estimate or determine the level and types of material support the IRI gave to the Afghan *mujahidin*. However, understanding why and how the IRI provided its support, to which parties, and what results were achieved is perhaps more revealing of Iran's purpose in undertaking such support.[660] The net effect of Iran's efforts in western Afghanistan demonstrates that it successfully became the state with the most influence over the *mujahidin* in that region by 1986.

Of the parties that operated in western Afghanistan, and as a known entity in Iran since 1979 with a very active anti-Soviet operation, *Harakat-e Islami* (HII) became a necessary evil that profited as the main recipient of IRI material support

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[658] Wilde, p. 19-20.
[659] Harpviken, p. 65.
[660] This is especially the case as Iran would not have been able to compete with massive amounts of military and financial aid given to *mujahidin* by Pakistan, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and China. Iran's resources were understandably strained while at war with Iraq.

until at least mid-1982.[661] Despite some accounts that Iran ceased its ties to HII after its office-closure incident in 1980 (described earlier),[662] much evidence exists to the contrary. British officials who met with the head of HII's apparently reopened office in Tehran in May 1982 confirmed that HII was the largest Afghan group in Iran and that it had 'close operational and ideological links' with the Iranian government. While the British learned that the IRI was providing *Harakat* with funds and equipment, they also detected HII's growing discontent with the Iranians: the party wanted more support from Iran and had some differences of opinion with the regime, one of which was its lack of aid to Afghan refugees.[663] Other first-hand *mujahidin* accounts in Afghanistan describe Iranian officials' provision of weapons, vehicles, and 'sizable' funds to HII fighters operating in Sharafat Koh in Farah Province near the Iranian border.[664]

There were many benefits for Iran's support of *Harakat*. As described previously, HII's leader, Asif Mohseni, had ties with Khomeini and other Iranian clerics during their years in exile studying and organizing in Najaf. Mohseni was one of the few internationally respected, high-level Shi'a clerics in Afghanistan during the 1980s, and his party mostly aligned with the IRI's ideological views in that it advocated for an Islamic government in Afghanistan that was neither bound to the east nor west.[665] Additionally, HII was the strongest Shi'a party fighting the Soviets and had the largest area of operation in the country's southwest, northwest, and on the borders of the Hazarajat.[666] *Harakat* also served as an important bridge for the IRI's communication with the larger Sunni resistance groups inside Afghanistan. As

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[661] FCO 37/2637, Folio 6, Tehran to FCO 10/2/1982; FCO 8/4578, Folio 7, Tehran to FCO, 1/3/1982.
[662] The 1980 incident is described on page at the beginning of this chapter. Some scholars who claim this include: Edwards, p. 226; Harpviken, p. 65; Khalilzad (1987), pp. 264-5; Rubin, p. 222, who said: After 1980, 'Muhsini (sic) never regained the confidence of Iranian authorities, but neither did he obtain significant support from Pakistan or the United States.'
[663] FCO 8/4578, Folio 14, Tehran to SAD, 3/5/1982.
[664] Sharafat Koh, also called Lor Koh, is a large mountain southeast of Farah city in Afghanistan and is located in between the major highways connecting Herat and Kandahar, and Daulatabad with Farah. The mountain was a *mujahidin* base from 1979 to 1985. After this, the Soviets succeeded in taking the mountain, and the *mujahidin* reportedly moved their bases, staging areas, and rest areas across the border into Iran. Jalali, Ali Ahmad and Grau, Lester. *Other Side of the Mountain* (2010), pp. 285-289.
[665] Dorronsoro, p. 141.
[666] Maley, William. *The Afghanistan Wars* (2nd ed.), (Basingstoke: 2009), p. 64; Harpviken, p. 73-74; Roy, 146; Emadi, *Politics,* p. 35.

a non-Hazara Qizilbash who grew up in Sunni Pashtun-dominated Kandahar, Mohseni encouraged HII's coordination with the Sunni resistance groups on operations and logistics.[667] While this would have initially appealed to Iranian officials, who at the time allowed Islamist Sunni groups to have offices in Iran,[668] HII's ties to Sunnis later became more of a liability than an asset.

Rifts between Mohseni and Iranian leaders came to a tipping point in mid-late 1982 when Mohseni—frustrated by Iran's increasing support for other Shi'a groups— broke ties with Iran, opened an HII office in Peshawar, and requested financial aid from Pakistani authorities.[669] By August 1983, British officials remarked that *Harakat* had clearly fallen out of favour with the Iranians.[670] However, pragmatism kept both Iran and HII from completely severing ties with one another. *Harakat*, like all *mujahidin* parties, could not survive without external aid, and its charm offensive toward Pakistan had proven unsuccessful.[671] Iran kept lines of communication open for the above-mentioned benefits but also to refrain from ostracizing *Harakat*. In late 1983, the IRI allegedly requested that HII collect intelligence on and get additional weapons from Pakistan-based *mujahidin* groups so that Iran could use them for itself.[672] While there is lacking evidence that Iran continued to provide material support to *Harakat* after 1983, the IRI allowed *Harakat* to operate in Iran and included the party in most of the Iran-sponsored efforts to form

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[667] Dorronsoro, p. 223. A first-hand account of an HII fighter is available in *Other Side of the Mountain*, pp. 301-303. Another of the key differences the Iranian *ulema* struggled to reconcile with Mohseni was his resistance to the role of *ulema* in politics. On this issue, he took the line of Iraq-based Ayatollah Khoei (who did not return to Iran after the revolution) rather than Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih.* For more, see Dorronsoro, pp. 160-161.

[668] Wilde, p. 20.

[669] FCO 8/4578, Folio 14, Tehran to SAD, 3/5/1982; Emadi, Hafizullah. 'Exporting Iran's Revolution: The Radicalization of the Shiite Movement in Afghanistan,' in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol 31. No.1, January 1995, p. 9.

[670] FCO 8/5146, Doc 10, Rundle (Tehran) to Mr Clare and Mr [Ian] McCredie, Iran/Afghanistan, 8/14/83.

[671] Dorronsoro, p. 143; Emadi, 'Exporting', pp. 9-10. Emadi argues that Pakistani officials were distrustful of supporting Shi'a parties that they lacked information about, and they feared antagonizing Iran by supporting them.

[672] CRRC, SH-GMID-D-001-432, Embassy Islamabad (Iraq) to General Intelligence Directorate, 'Iran-Afghani Relations.' 10/19/1983. This idea in general is also mentioned in Zalmay Khalilzad's work without sourcing. See, Khalilzad, Zalmay. 'Iranian Policy towards Afghanistan since the Revolution,' in D. Menashri (ed.), *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*, (Boulder: 1990), pp. 238–40.

coalitions of Shi'a *mujahidin* groups from 1983-1987.[673] In sum, the IRI's actions regarding *Harakat* after 1983 show the regime's concern about maintaining access to the non-Khomeinist Shi'a in Afghanistan in an effort to hedge. *Harakat* was the uniter of that demographic, fought the Soviets well, and could provide insights into and connections to the wider Afghan resistance.

To a lesser extent, the Iranian government provided material and other support for *Jamiat-e Islami,* one of the strongest of the Peshawar-based *mujahidin* groups with the most substantial operation in western Afghanistan.[674] Similar to *Harakat*, support for *Jamiat* had certain advantages: *Jamiat* was highly effective at fighting the Soviets, it was the largest *mujahidin* party operating in western Afghanistan with 1,000 fighters, and it had a substantial hold on Herat, a strategically important city for Iran due to its large Shi'a population and position on the key supply line.[675] *Jamiat* also had ideological and ethnolinguistic ties to Iran. Though it was not Shi'a, it was one of Afghanistan's main Islamist *mujahidin* parties, and most of its members and leadership were educated, Persian-speakers.[676]

The CIA surmised that prior to 1983, the *Jamiat* group around Herat city was 'well armed with small arms and machine guns' which they had collected from Iran, other unidentified 'local sources,' and by capturing them from DRA forces. To that point they had only been receiving small amounts of weapons from Pakistan, as supply caravans took about a month to cross from Peshawar to western Afghanistan.[677] As with other non-Shi'a groups, *Jamiat*'s links to Pakistan and, therefore, the United States, were a key concern for Iran. The IRI closed *Jamiat*'s Mashhad office intermittently throughout the early 1980s out of suspicion for the group's external ties, but *Jamiat* allegedly held other offices in Tehran, Zahedan, Zabul, and Isfahan.[678]

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[673] FBIS-SAS-85-147, FBIS-SAS-86-022, FBIS-SAS-87-023.
[674] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984.
[675] Ibid.
[676] Harpviken, p. 89; Rubin, p. 27. Dorronsoro says that Persian-speaking Tajiks comprised three quarters of *Jamiat's* ranks. See Dorrosoro, p. 162.
[677] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984.
[678] FBIS-SAS-80-147, FBIS-SAS-82-010.

By late 1982, *Jamiat* began to express resentment over Iran's refusal to give them more material support, leading the group in 1983 to begin coordinating more with other resistance groups on logistics and accessing supplies.[679] This threatened the IRI's strategy at the time, which was to actively restrict Pakistan's weapons supply for the *mujahidin* from reaching the western Afghan provinces in order to control the supply line and what groups would benefit from those supplies.[680] According to the CIA, *Jamiat* 'tried to improve their relations with Iran…[but] were disappointed in late 1983 because their fundamentalist sympathies had not gained them any special treatment from the Iranians.' *Jamiat* appealed to Iran publicly for fraternal relations and aid based on their common Soviet enemy, but Iran was unlikely to be swayed as *Jamiat* often made the same appeals directly to western and rival countries.[681]

Despite these issues, as with *Harakat*, Iran maintained some ties with *Jamiat* in order to serve its own priorities: keeping the western provinces free from Soviet and DRA domination and bringing Afghan Islamists into the fold as much as possible. As such, *Jamiat*'s offices remained intact in Iran, one of which was reportedly for contacting the UN office in Tehran to ask for assistance for war-ravaged civilians in Herat.[682] The party was also included in some of Iran's public support for the Iran-based Islamist *mujahidin*, an example of which was a December 1984 press conference in which *Jamiat*, Hekmatyar's *Hezb-e Islami*, and other Shi'a Iran-based parties collectively condemned the latest Soviet atrocities in Afghanistan.[683] By 1985, there was some evidence to suggest Iran cashed in on its lingering relations with *Jamiat*. On more than one occasion, the DRA accused *Jamiat*, Iran-backed Shi'a groups and the IRGC of working together on operations against its forces in the western provinces.[684] British officials even expressed around this time that 'the Iranians would like to woo the major fundamentalist parties, such as *Jamiat* and *Hesb-e Islami*, from Pakistan's embrace…Such an approach would

[679] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984.
[680] NSA, CO001395, CIA Internal Memorandum, 'Iranians Harass Afghan Refugees', 1/17/84.
[681] Ibid.
[682] FBIS-SAS-84-124.
[683] FBIS-SAS-84-250.
[684] FBIS-SAS-86-042; FBIS-SAS-85-053.

complement the direction of Iranian assistance to resistance groups which…seems more often aimed at increasing Iranian influence than in fighting Russians.'[685]

As mentioned previously, the Iranian clergy had already established relationships with small Shi'a groups operating in Afghanistan, and the ascendency of the former in 1983 shifted the majority of Iran's official support to the Shi'a groups loyal to Iran that modelled themselves after the Iranian revolution. By early 1984, the CIA estimated that the two to four pro-Iran parties operating in western Afghanistan had up to 1,000 fighters, matching *Jamiat* (the region's largest force) in size.[686]

The best manned and the main recipient of Iranian aid was *Hezbollah Afghanistan*.[687] The group appealed to Iran as a more palatable alternative to its former client *Harakat* for several reasons. First, *Hezbollah* had a large presence in Herat but also operated in *Harakat*'s stronghold of Kandahar.[688] The group's commander in Herat was Qari Ahmad, an infamous *mujahid* also known as Qari Yekdast ('one hand'), and its Kandahar commander was Mukhtar Sarwari. Fittingly for Iran's new requirements for support, Sarwari was opposed to *Harakat* because of the accusations that its leader had accepted American aid. Dorronsoro describes *Hezbollah* more as an ensemble of groups financed and armed by Iran.[689] Second, the two branches of *Hezbollah* appear to have largely replaced *Harakat* as Iran's channel for supplies to the groups the IRI supported in Afghanistan's interior and as a conduit between the IRI and the wider Afghan resistance. According to Roy, while the Kandahar branch played a more active role in fighting the Soviets, Herat branch's 'political importance [was] greater than their military importance, for they serve[d] as an intermediary between the resistance (here *Jamiat*) [sic] and the Iranian authorities.'[690] Through a proxy like *Hezbollah*, Iran could maintain a once-removed

[685] FCO 8/5899, Folio 16, 11/5/85.
[686] CIA, 'Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces,' 5/1984. Aside from *Hezbollah*, other pro-Khomeini groups along the Iranian-Afghan border included *Nehzat* and *Reja*. See, Roy, pp. 129-130.
[687] Wilde, p. 19-20.
[688] Roy, p. 129; Dorronsoro (2005), p. 142.
[689] Fittingly, Sarwari opposed Asif Mohseni, leader of *Harakat* and also based in Kandahar, because of accusations the latter had accepted American aid. For more see Dorronsoro (2005), p. 142.
[690] Roy, p.129, 147.

connection with Pakistan-based resistance groups that would mitigate the domestic political fallout of interacting with them directly.

Third, *Hezbollah* was a party over which Iran exerted the most operational control. Roy argues that the Iranians took full advantage of groups like Afghan *Hezbollah* that were opportunistically loyal to the IRI in order to be well armed and supplied. The Iranians placed *Hezbollah* directly under the operational command of the IRGC, some of whom reportedly fought alongside them in operations in the Iran-Afghanistan border area. [691] In mid-1983 article in Soviet paper *Izvestia* reported this and also detailed the weapons, cash, and propaganda papers found in the possession of Qari Yakdast in Herat following the visit of high-level Iranian clergy promising aid to rebel bands if they united.[692] In another example, in March 1986 the Afghan Foreign Ministry served the Iranian chargé d'affaires in Kabul a formal complaint memorandum that included an incident on October 3, 1985 when 'some 400 members of the *Hezbollah* and *Jamiat-e Islami* bands and Iranian Revolutionary Guards attacked the Qazel Qala region' of Faryab Province. The Iranian charge, at the time Mohammad Taherian, described as responsible for 'hand[ling] the transfer of military aid to the militias fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan.'[693]

Iranian support to the Afghan *mujahidin* in the Hazarajat of central Afghanistan during the mid-1980s is a vastly more thoroughly documented phenomenon than its activities in the west. Because the population in the Hazarajat is more homogenous (Shi'a Hazara), and due to Iran's pre-established religious and cultural ties to the Hazaras, Iranian clientalism there was to a large extent expected. The few scholars who have studied the Afghan Hazara in depth have provided valuable accounts of Iran's intervention in their affairs during this period. Unlike the west where *mujahidin* confrontation against Soviet and DRA forces was commonplace, the Hazarajat was largely isolated from the wider Afghan conflict, a fact that made it fertile ground for the expansion of Iranian influence. In this environment, Iran established and supported loyal clients in central Afghanistan

[691] Apparently the party had taken the name '*Hezbollah*' to try to outdo the other Khomeinist groups in the area. See, Roy, pp. 119, 129.
[692] FCO 8/5146, Folio 8.
[693] Shay, Shaul. *Islamic Terror in the Balkans,* (Piscataway: 2007).

earlier and with greater success than it did in the west. Zalmay Khalilzad best summarized the results of the IRI's efforts to support these groups in his 1990 work: 'The second-most successful case of exporting the revolution—after Lebanon—has been the Hazarajat, where the two Iranian-backed groups became dominant at the expense of older traditionalist Shi'i organizations.'[694]

The conditions in the Hazarajat leading up to 1982, most exemplified by systematic oppression of the Hazaras by successive Afghan central governments, and a vacuum of those governments' authority in the Hazarajat, presented Iran with advantageous circumstances for establishing its influence there. After Mohammad Taraki's April 1978 coup, the Hazarajat was in open rebellion against the Pashtun-dominated PDPA government for their intensive policies of Hazara persecution. With the mutually dismal relations between Iran and Afghanistan at the time, the DRA accused Iran as inciting the Hazaras' unrest, but as mentioned previously, there is little evidence to support that claim. When Hafizullah Amin took power from Taraki, he announced that of the 12,000 Afghans ordered killed under Taraki, 7,000 were Hazaras that had been executed at Pul-e Charki Prison over the period of a few months, particularly the Hazara religious leaders. According to Dorronsoro, the DRA's 'fiercest suppression of the Shi'ites was the result of fear of Iranian influence, widely overestimated, and of traditional contempt for the Hazaras.'[695] This alarmed the Iranians, who were outraged at the systematic execution of their coreligionists. That the DRA took these actions out of fear of Iranian intervention became ironic when the outcome of those actions was in fact an increase in Iranian intervention. While there were some in Iran that advocated this course of action to protect their endangered Afghan brothers, others saw it as an opening to draw the Hazara even closer to Iran to aid in the expansion of Iran's revolution.

Leading up to and after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, conditions actually improved in the Hazarajat. By summer of 1979, the Hazaras' uprisings had successfully liberated most of the Hazarajat from central government presence.[696]

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[694] Khalilzad (1990), p. 239.
[695] Dorronsoro, p. 103-4.
[696] Grevemeyer, p. 212.

After the invasion, the Soviets' priorities in Afghanistan translated into little interest in the interior. Their concerns lie in their control over country's key economic centres and the main communication and supply lines. The Soviets only maintained a minor presence in Bamiyan city, and no sizable Soviet operations took place in the Hazarajat after 1980.[697] This did not change over time. In 1984, the Soviets admitted to having only a few bases in the Hazarajat.[698] However, a lack of prioritization did not reduce the awareness of Karmal's government, and later Najibullah's, that the relative autonomy of the Hazarajat could present an area of uncomfortable Iranian political leverage against the DRA.[699] This is precisely what happened as the external parties in the conflict began increasingly cultivating relationships with the Hazara resistance parties. Initially, Pakistan supported Hazara leftist groups in 1979-1981 to attempt a check of Iran's influence, but Pakistan quickly abandoned that effort when it realized that it could not compete with the Iranian revolution's appeal to Hazara activists, nor could it 'in any real way...break into the religious networks.'[700] This resulted in no real Soviet, DRA, or Pakistani competition against expanding Iranian influence in the Hazarajat in the 1980s.

It was not only the pre-established religious networks between Shi'a clerics in Iran and the Hazarajat that primed it for Iranian involvement. The Hazarajat was in effect a perfect storm of qualities Iran's Islamists preferred to support: the Hazara were Shi'a with many following a Khomeinist interpretation, they were Persian speakers, and they had a multitude of cultural and practical ties to Iran ranging from Hazaras studying and working in Iran to trading in Iranian goods. Harpviken aptly writes, 'as a religious minority in Afghanistan, the Shi'a Hazara have oriented themselves towards Iran, particularly for religious guidance.' Afghan Hazara *ulema* had networks that extended past the Hazarajat, and they acknowledged religious authority either in Iran or Iraq.[701] It is thus no surprise that the IRI saw the Hazarajat

[697] Dorronsoro, p. 218.
[698] Urben, p. 154.
[699] Dorronsoro, p. 218.
[700] Ibid, pp. 19-20.
[701] Harpviken, p. 22, 28.

as an ideal place for the export of their revolution, as its people 'were receptive to [Iran's] religious and political ideas.'[702]

As mentioned previously, there was a substantial Iran-based component to radicalizing Hazara Shi'a in Iran's style of Islamism. After the Iranian revolution, political groups were established among Hazara students in Iran, who later became leaders of the Afghan resistance groups advocating Khomeini's style of Islamism.[703] Additionally, the several thousand Hazara workers employed in Iran before and after the revolution provided a crucial financial source for a significant proportion the Hazarajat's population, resistance fighters included.[704] In the early 1980s, several dozen Hazaras who had worked or studied in Iran returned to Afghanistan armed to take control of their areas of origin.[705] The infiltration of these groups created a split in the political structure of the Hazarajat, primarily based on views toward Iran.[706]

With a lack of Soviet, DRA and Pakistani presence in the Hazarajat, and therefore no common enemy to unite the Hazara political groups, factional infighting mired the Hazarajat throughout the 1980s, a fact that Iran diligently exploited for its own benefit.[707] The political structure in the Hazarajat before 1982 was dominated by the Shura, a coalition of governing parties that had been built on the uprisings in Hazarajat in 1978 and 1979. Many scholars idealize the days of the Shura as the first example of a truly representative government in the Hazarajat's history.[708] However, while the Shura built administrative institutions for the provision of governance and services, part of its failure was due to the demanding obligations it placed on its citizens, including taxation and conscription.[709] The other more causal factor was Iran's role in the Shura's demise.

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[702] Emadi, *Politics,* p. 143.
[703] The Hazaras made up a disproportionately high percentage of the Afghan refugee population (and therefore the Iran-based Afghan resistance). For more see Harpviken, p. 85 and Mousavi, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan*, p. 64, 152; Grevemeyer, Jan-Heeren, *Ethnicity and National Liberation: the Afghan Hazara Between Resistance and Civil War*
[704] Grevemeyer, p.215.
[705] Dorronsoro, p. 123; Grevemeyer, p. 215.
[706] Dorronsoro, p. 160.
[707] Maley, p. 64.
[708] Such as, Harpviken, p. 64, Ibrahimi (2006), p. 12; Dorronsoro, p. 139.
[709] Harpviken, p. 64, Ibrahimi (2006), p. 12.

The Shura from its inception expected to gain support from its coreligionists in Iran—in fact, Mehdi Hashemi, head of the IRGC's Office of Liberation Movements had even listed it to become a beneficiary of Iranian support. But Hashemi soon after changed his mind when the Shura's leader, Sayyid Ali Beheshti, refused to recognize Khomeini as the supreme religious authority and asserted himself as Khomeini's equivalent, despite desperately needing Iranian aid.[710] This did not suit Iran, which incrementally provided more aid to the radical Islamist elements operating within the Shura.[711] Perhaps doomed at the outset, the clerics outnumbered landowners and secular intellectuals in their representation in the Shura's leadership.[712] From late 1981, Iran's unbalanced support in favour of certain Islamists in the Shura ignited an internal conflict that quickly escalated into a full-scale civil war as the parties in the Hazarajat vied for power.[713]

As with the west, Iran shifted its policy for material support to the Afghan resistance groups in the Hazarajat to favour those radical Shi'a Islamists that were deemed loyal to Iran. Because the Hazarajat was homogenous as almost exclusively Shi'a Hazara, differences between the region's Shi'a Islamists were determined by ideological alignment with the concept of Khomeini as *velayat-e faqih*.[714] Complete fealty to Khomeini meant stronger Iranian influence over these groups' operations and administration. Iran's efforts in the Hazarajat from 1982 through 1986 clearly show that the ultimate aim in achieving such influence was to create a united, loyal political entity that could later serve Iran's interests as part of the national power structure in Afghanistan.[715] Iran achieved this by channelling the majority of its financial, political, and military assistance for the Afghan resistance to two groups: *Nasr* and *Sepah-e Pasdaran*, both of which were under the direct control of the IRGC.[716]

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[710] Ibrahimi (2006), p. 14.
[711] Ibrahimi (2006), p. 4; Dorronsoro, p. 140.
[712] Emadi, 'Exporting', p. 7.
[713] Maley, p. 64; Harpviken, p. 73; Dorronsoro, p. 140.
[714] Dorronsoro, p. 160.
[715] Maley, p. 64.
[716] DIA, 'Iranian Support to the Afghan Resistance', 7/11/1985, p. 1.

Conclusion

The Iranian Revolution and the drastic ideological and structural changes to the regime compared to previous Iranian regimes has led to the tendency in academic literature analysing Iranian domestic and foreign policy to break before or after the revolution. However, this chapter has attempted to show the consistent themes of nationalism, irredentism, and regional supremacy in Iran's foreign policy approach during the Islamic Republic compared with previous regime's policies.

In the case of Iran's policy toward Afghanistan after 1979, the regime's 'export' of Iran's Islamic revolutionary influence to the various Afghan political groups following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a religious manifestation of Iranian nationalist ideology, the primary goal of which was to advance Iran's regional position in competition with the Soviet Union and the United States. The key ways the Islamic Republic did this from 1982-1987 was by rejecting Afghanistan's Soviet-backed government, using Afghan refugees in Iran to fight against superpower interests in the wider region (for example, against American support of Israel), and financially, militarily, and politically supporting both Shi'a and Sunni Afghan resistance groups in their armed struggle against the Soviet Union, and even against other Afghan resistance groups backed by the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Iran's leveraging not only of religion but of its ethnolinguistic similarities with the Afghan parties it supported, and hedging by supporting some it shared neither of those things with, shows its concern was more about succeeding against great-power encroachment than it was about advancing a purely religious ideology.

Conclusion

This dissertation argues that successive Iranian governments interfered in Afghanistan's internal and external affairs as an integral part of Iran's consistent policy aim of achieving a dominant position of regional leadership. Despite the different ideological and structural composition of these Iranian governments, this policy's consistency stems from the historical experience and mythology around Iran's once-great status as an empire—destroyed by the Afghans and the great powers during the colonial period—and the resultant Iranian irredentism toward Afghanistan. Therefore, over two centuries of Iran's approach toward Afghanistan shows that a defining feature is that it is inextricably ties to Iran's competition against the great powers that have continued to be involved in Afghanistan and the wider region.

In order to lay the foundation for the themes of this work, Chapter One introduces the 'Myth of the Great Civilisation' and the 'Myth of Foreign Domination,' which both inform and are informed by Iran's experiences, materialise into the ideology of Iranian nationalism, and impact Iranian foreign policy behaviour. The 'Myth of the Great Civilisation' stems from Iran's experience as a once-great empire, a leader of its region. The 'Myth of Foreign Domination' was developed during the colonial period and afterward, when the superpowers (first Britain and Russia, then the United States and the Soviet Union) dominated Iran and deprived her of her domestic, foreign, and regional power. The impact of these myths was to centralise the importance of Iranian nationalism, which, when manifested in Iran's foreign policy behaviour, led to continuous Iranian adventurism and irredentism in Afghanistan as part of Iran's unwavering priority to restore her regional power.

Because myths and nationalist ideology are based on, and reinforced by, historical experience, Chapter Two discusses how Iran and Afghanistan's historical experiences with British and Russian domination during the Great Game informed Iran's own strategy toward Afghanistan in the twentieth century when Iran and Afghanistan became more independent from those powers. It explains how the creation of the Afghan state, and the end of the Persian Empire, was fundamental to

Iran's later desire to re-establish control or influence over Afghanistan as a way to regain regional power. Once Iran had gained some independence from Britain and Russia with the ascension of Reza Shah to the throne, early signs of Iran's attempts to co-opt Afghanistan as part of a bid for regional leadership and further great-power independence emerged. The key example of this was the Saadabad Pact of 1937. The pact was an act of Iranian political irredentism, or retaking leadership of what was formerly Iran's. The pact was Iran's initiative, it did not include a great power, and the territories of all the participating countries has all been, at different moments in history, under the control of the Persian Empire.

Chapter Three examines how Iran expanded upon these policies, at the peak of its economic, political, and military power in the late 1960s through mid-1970s. The Cold War had recreated a dynamic between the two superpowers in Iran's region that was highly reminiscent of the Great Game era (except the United States had taken up Britain's mantle). However, because of Iran's historical distrust of the Russia, Mohammad Reza Shah chose to ally Iran closely with the United States. This resulted in Iran benefitting from massive American economic, military, and political investment that led to the building of substantial Iranian oil wealth, the amassing of a large and modern military arsenal, and the enabling of Iran as a political proxy for a superpower. Part of what led to Iran achieving this success was leveraging America's fears of Soviet expansionism and communist penetration in the region, which would impact American economic and national security interests. The Shah did this by consistently leveraging his knowledge of and involvement in Afghanistan, warning the Americans of Soviet penetration there, and undertaking the Iranian and American foreign policy response to that problem.

When the Afghan Coup of 1973 occurred and brought Mohammad Daoud Khan to power, a man known for ties with Moscow, the Shah used the power he had gained in the preceding years to develop political, economic, and military dominance over Afghanistan until he succeeded in controlling the foreign policy of Afghanistan to benefit Iran. This included initial military efforts to scare Daoud into submission, then after a fragile rapprochement, offering Daoud massive economic assistance to tilt Afghanistan away from the Soviet Union toward Iran. In exchange for that

assistance, the Shah obtained Daoud's support for the long-view goal of the Shah, his proposed, Iran-led regional economic cooperative. In this way, Iran's foreign policy toward Afghanistan was critical to Iran's persistent, and in this case successful, desire to attain regional dominance in competition with the great powers.

With the drastic ideological and structural changes that occurred during the transition to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Chapter Four argues that consistent themes of nationalism, irredentism, and regional supremacy in Iran's foreign policy approach during the Islamic Republic was consistent with previous regime's policies. Iran's policy approach toward Afghanistan after 1979 was couched within the regime's 'export' of Iran's Islamic Revolution. In practice, over the course of several years, this policy included supporting (and in some cases commanding) various Afghan political groups after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Iran's stated purpose was to free Afghanistan from secular, superpower oppression, and united the country under an Islamic government in Iran's new image. However, Iran's policy revealed itself to be a religious manifestation of Iranian nationalist ideology, as the primary goal was not primarily religious but to advance Iran's regional position in competition with the Soviet Union and the United States. This was particularly visible in the Islamic Republic's policy from 1982-1987 in which Iran did the following: used Afghan refugees in Iran, often lured there on religious grounds, to fight against superpower interests in the wider region (for example, against American support of Israel); and, provided financial, military, and political support of both Shi'a and Sunni Afghan resistance groups to drive the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan as well as compete with the massive American, Saudi, and Pakistani support for the majority of Sunni parties. Therefore, Iran's focus in supporting Afghan resistance groups with shared religious and ethnolinguistic similarities, as well as hedging by supporting some with which it shared neither, was not about primarily about advancing the regime's specific religious ideology. It shows that Iran's principal concern was about fighting back great-power encroachment by gaining as much control or influence over different polities in Afghanistan as possible, and using all other available means.

The Islamic Republic's continued support of multiple Afghan parties in the late 1980s lay the groundwork for increased Iranian influence in Afghanistan in the

1990s. In 1986 and 1987, Iran had finally succeeded in uniting the Afghan Shi'a groups it supported into one party, *Hezb-e Wahdat*, with the view that they become a united political bloc in the negotiations determining a national reconciliation government for Kabul. The two things that stood in the way of this being realized were that Soviet troops remained in Afghanistan, and the Pashtun- and Sunni-dominated, Islamabad-Washington-Riyadh-backed parties made up the majority of those involved in the political process.

That great-power involvement in Afghanistan remained the primary concern behind all of Iran's efforts was abundantly clear when, as soon as Tehran knew the Soviet Union was pulling its troops out of Afghanistan, it tilted toward the Soviets and refocused on its remaining regional competitors. In the summer of 1987, then-President Rafsanjani visited Gorbachev in Moscow and expressed support for the Gorbachev's decision to withdrawal troops from Afghanistan. He reportedly told Gorbachev, 'If you have resolved to pull out of Afghanistan we are prepared to assist you, so that after your departure there will be no U.S. domination in Afghanistan.'[717] When the Soviet Union finally withdrew its troops from Afghanistan in February 1989, the Iran-Iraq War had also ended, and Iran was in a stronger position to focus on the issues plaguing her eastern border. Iran encouraged the Shi'a parties it had backed to demand representation in the February 1989 talks with the Sunni parties in Peshawar. The Shi'a parties sought 25% representation in any future government for Kabul. The majority Sunni parties forcefully rejected this demand, as they argued that the Shi'a parties only represented 15% of the Afghan population and had only played a minor role in resisting the Soviet occupation. They offered them zero representation in any future Kabul government, and the Shi'a parties walked out of the negotiations.[718]

Their years-long efforts frustrated, Iran and *Hezb-e Wahdat* pivoted. Iran considered the Soviet-backed government in Kabul to be the only thing preventing the takeover of Sunni parties backed by the Washington-Kabul-Riyadh alliance. It

[717] Emadi, *Exporting Iran's Revolution,* p. 10.
[718] Ahady, Anwar-ul-Haq. 'The Changing Interests of the Regional Powers and the Resolution of the Afghan Conflict,' in *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Summer 1994, pp. 85-86.

continued to support the Shi'a parties politically, but made sure they did not fight against the Najibullah government.[719] This turned out to be a smart calculation by Tehran. Due to some continued support from the Soviets and a lack of a broad enough appeal of the Sunni *mujahidin* parties at that time, the Sunni parties were unable to oust Najibullah for a few years. It was not until after the Soviet Union fell in December 1991, with Russia shortly thereafter ending its support of Najibullah, that his government fell in March 1992. This was in good part due to the machinations of Iran.[720]

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Iran continued to work diligently to obtain influence over a future government in Kabul with as strong a coalition as possible. As previously, this was pursued using a dual-tracked effort to leverage ethno-linguistic ties rather than strictly religious ties, as well as continued support of *Hezb-e Wahdat*. This was partially inspired by Iran seeing an opportunity to extend her influence in the newly created and independent Central Asian states. In 1991, Iran brought Tajikistan, *Jamiat-e Islami* (which represented the majority of Afghanistan's Persian-speaking population), and *Hezb-e Wahdat* together to sign a cultural agreement based on their common Persian language.[721] This was undoubtedly made possible by Iran's efforts in the 1980s, outlined in Chapter Four, to provide some support and remain on good terms with *Jamiat*, despite Iran's preference for the more loyal Shi'a parties that later formed *Hezb-e Wahdat*. It cannot be ignored that this regional collective, reminiscent of earlier Iran-led regional coalitions, also served Iran's goals of regional leadership. Iran was now in direct competition for access to the new, open Central Asian markets with Pakistan, and Afghanistan was a necessary part in this scheme in order to transport the goods from Central Asia to Iranian or Pakistani ports.[722] Iran used its now closer relations to *Jamiat*—led by Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud (both Persian-speaking Tajiks from northern Afghanistan)—to encourage it to form an alliance with another northern Afghan warlord, Abdul Rashid

[719] Rubin, Barnett. *Afghanistan from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. (New York: 2013).
[720] Ahady, p. 86.
[721] Wilde, Andreas. 'Continuity and Hiatus: Structural Patterns of Iran's Policy in Afghanistan,' in *Internationales Asienforum,* Vol. 40, No. 1-2, 2009, p. 22.
[722] Ahady, p. 86.

Dostum (a Persian-speaking Uzbek) with *Hezb-e Wahdat*, and several other smaller Shi'a parties. By March 1992, this non-Pashtun bloc, strengthened by support from Iran and the dynamic leadership of Massoud, attacked Kabul and toppled Najibullah's government. This was a halcyon moment for Iran, but it spurred a backlash. The Pashtun parties and their Pakistani and Saudi backers viewed this development and Iran's influence in Kabul as highly troubling, especially since Afghan governments had historically been Pashtun dominated. This, and ethnic infighting and warlordism between the non-Pashtun coalition led to the beginning of a tumultuous four years of civil war in Afghanistan.[723]

With the Cold War over, Russian and American abandonment of their efforts and their proxies in Afghanistan had led to regional powers having free reign in the country. Thus, the Afghan Civil War turned into a complex proxy war between Iran and Pakistan (the latter with help from Saudi Arabia). As all the parties prioritized increasing their power in the region, they saw their success in this conflict, an indirect competition with other regional powers, as vital to their regional foreign policy goals.[724] While Iran's policy was to support the many diverse parties in its non-Pashtun bloc, the Pakistan-Saudi bloc of parties was mostly ethnically (Pashtun) and religiously (Wahhabi Sunni) unified, and included Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's *Hezb-e Islami* and the groups that would become the Taliban. The Iran-backed coalition, rather quickly after taking power in Kabul, began to disintegrate, with Rabbani more inclined to stay in Iran's orbit and Massoud less inclined. The latter distanced himself from Iran and drew closer to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia for support, which infuriated Iran. Many similar changes of allegiances continued during the war, including at one point with Hekmatyar joining Iran and Dostum. In this chaotic environment, unexpected to most observers of the conflict, the Taliban gained enough power to eventually overtake Kabul and establish a new extremist government.[725]

The establishment of a radical Sunni government in Afghanistan under Taliban rule was a devastating loss for Iran, and probably the worst possible outcome

[723] Milani, 'Iran,' p. 240.
[724] Ahady, p. 88
[725] Milani, 'Iran,' p. 241-2.

in terms of her regional interests. Iran's efforts against the Taliban from that point forward were based both on ideological and strategic interests. Iran decided to double down and became the main supplier of fuel, weapons, and other equipment to all the different groups opposing the Taliban, including Massoud's (which had recently opposed *Hezb-e Wahdat*). This was mainly because Iran saw continued Pakistani and Saudi support of the Taliban a threat to her regional interests, including possibly ensuring Pakistan's monopoly over Central Asian trade. The situation hit its lowest point for Iran when forces aligned with the Taliban (apparently Pakistanis from an allied anti-Shi'a, Sunni extremist group) murdered eight Iranian officials and journalists in Mazar-e Sharif during the August 1998 Taliban siege of that city. This and the capture of 35 other Iranian nationals by the Taliban caused Iran to send 70,000 Iranian troops to the Afghan border and threaten a military response, the closest Iran and Afghanistan had come to full-out warfare in centuries. The UN had to dispatch a special envoy to negotiate the return of Iranian detainees and the bodies of the murdered Iranians to deescalate the threat of war. In turn, Iran became one of the biggest suppliers of arms and ammunition to the United Front (more commonly known as the Northern Alliance), which essentially came to command an insurgency against the Taliban government.[726]

There have been a several journal-length articles that describe Iran's role in Afghanistan leading up to and following September 11, 2001, and the subsequent U.S. invasion of Afghanistan to kill or capture the Afghanistan-based terrorists responsible for the attack. Mohsen Milani and Andreas Wilde in particular provide detailed accounts, from Iran helping the United States ally with Northern Alliance forces to topple the Taliban, to Iran's involvement in many multinational initiatives over the years that have played an important part in Afghanistan's reconstruction, to Iran's financial and political support to friendly, high-level Afghan officials.[727]

Many have pointed to how auspicious it was for Iran that the United States singlehandedly removed Iran's two closest enemies in the region (the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq) in the early years after 9/11. This not only

[726] Rubin, Barnett. *Afghanistan from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. (New York: 2013).
[727] Wilde, *Underestimated and Ignored,* pp. 104-8; Milani, 'Iran', pp. 246-256.

decreased Iran's immediate security concerns from hostile, Sunni regimes on both of its borders, but it also enabled Iran to vastly increase its influence campaign and other adventurism in the region. The fact that the Americans stayed for years in Afghanistan and Iraq only exacerbated this issue. While Iran had initially been on-side with the Americans to oust a common enemy in Afghanistan, their continued presence emboldened Iran to revert to a policy of prioritising the rejection of superpower presence in Afghanistan, as it had for centuries before, in order to elevate Iran's regional status. And critically, Iran had spent the preceding twenty to thirty years developing sophisticated networks in Afghanistan and elsewhere to help advance its interests. These were primed for leveraging against the United States, or the Afghan government, as needed.

In recent years, there have been many overt examples of the types of Iranian policies toward Afghanistan described throughout this dissertation. In fact, some of the following examples served as catalysts for this research. A selection include:

- 2008: Then-Commander of the IRGC Qassem Suleimani allegedly wrote in a 2008 letter to American General David Petraeus "you should know that I…control the policy for Iran with respect to Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, and Afghanistan."[728] (See Chapter Four for the IRGC's leading role in generating political and militant networks for Iran in Afghanistan and elsewhere.)
- 2010: The Iranian government provides "bags of cash" to Afghan President Hamid Karzai "in payments amounting to millions of dollars….Afghan and Western officials said the Iranian payments were intended to drive a wedge between Mr. Karzai and the United States and NATO."[729] (See Chapters Three and Four for many examples of Iran bribing Afghan officials or financially supporting Afghan political groups to pull them away from the superpowers.)
- 2011: Iran increases trade with Afghanistan and attempts to get Afghanistan to use Chabahar's port facilities as its principle trade

[728] Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, p. 232.
[729] New York Times, 'Afghan Leader Admits His Office Gets Cash from Iran,' 25/10/2010.

route, rather than relying on the route to Pakistan's port at Karachi. (Chapter Three for Iran bringing Afghanistan into a trade cooperative in hopes Afghanistan's use of Iranian transportation and trade facilities would help boost Iran's economic and regional standing.)

- 2013-2020: Afghan refugees and migrant workers—trained, equipped, and financed by the IRGC as the 'Fatemiyoun Brigade'—fight alongside the Iran-allied Asad regime against Western-backed Syrian resistance fighters throughout the Syrian civil war.[730] (See Chapter Four for Iran's weaponisation of Afghan refugees and migrant workers to further their regional interests.)
- 2018: Following President Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement, and the initiation of his 'maximum pressure' campaign of sanctions and deterring malign Iranian activity in the region, reports began to increase about Iran supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan (despite past enmity between them).[731] The State Department later provided evidence of Iranian-made rockets, drones, and other equipment reportedly found in the possession of Taliban fighters in Helmand and other parts of Afghanistan.[732] (See Chapter Four for Iran's material support for Afghan resistance groups as a lever against Soviet and American presence in Afghanistan.)
- 2019-2020: Iran's ties to the Taliban become more overt, as Taliban delegations repeatedly visit Tehran for consultations with Iranian leadership before or after engaging in talks with U.S. officials about a

[730] Human Rights Watch, 'Iran Sending Thousands of Afghans to Fight in Syria,' 29/1/2016; New York Times, 'Afghans Go to Syria to Fight for Its Government, and Anguish Results,' 28/7/2016; Afghan Analysts Network, 'The Two Faces of the Fatemiyun (I): Revisiting the Male Fighters,' 8/7/2019.
[731] Wall Street Journal, 'You Didn't Take Action': Afghans Reject Official Narrative of War Against Taliban,' 21/5/2018;
[732] State Department official Brian Hook said that Iran had been supporting the Taliban since 2007. United States Institute for Peace, 'U.S. Unveils Evidence of Iranian Arms Transfer,' 30/11/2018.

U.S.-Taliban agreement and the composition of a future Afghan government.[733]

These policies and their parallels to the many examples in this work further prove that Iran's motivations in Afghanistan have been consistent for centuries and are only intensified by superpower involvement there. This entire dissertation has sought to demonstrate the power of history and myth to better understand the contemporary foreign policies of states and their interactions with one another. However, the above examples also show the implications of failing to do so: Iran's adventurism in Afghanistan and the region, until perhaps the last couple of years, has been relatively ignored in public discourse, and unchecked by other nations. This work has detailed the extent of Iran's activities in Afghanistan, but Iran also conducts similar activities, and has larger and more powerful proxies, all over the region, from Iraq, to Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. As such, perhaps this dissertation can serve as a useful framework for more long-view historical studies on Iran's motivations and actions in these other regional countries.

[733] Al Jazeera, 'Taliban delegation visits Iran to "discuss latest developments",' 17/9/2019; Voice of America, 'Tehran Hosts Taliban Leaders for Afghan Peace Talks,' 27/11/2019; RFE/RL, ' Taliban Links To Iran Threaten Peace Talks With U.S.,' 10/1/2020.

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